California Holocaust Memorial Week

April 24–30, 2006

"Too Young" by Amanda Cagan

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April 24, 2006

Dear Friends,

I am proud to present the 2006 California Holocaust Memorial Week Book. Throughout my tenure in the Legislature, recognizing Holocaust Survivors living in California has been one of the most rewarding projects I have carried out. When I first came to the Assembly, Holocaust Memorial Week was recognized, but with little to set it apart from the other regular business of the week. I considered it my duty to create a meaningful event to honor the many ordinary people who went through extraordinary circumstances and who now live in California.

I created a project to capture the stories of Holocaust Survivors and pass on their knowledge to the next generation to coincide with the event. I began working with Congregation Beth David and the South Bay Holocaust Survivor group in my district to facilitate high school students in interviewing and writing essays about Holocaust Survivor experiences. The first booklet in 2003 had ten stories published. The following year we collected twenty-one stories. Last year, we expanded our own partnerships and included the stories and essays from five other Assembly Member's Offices and compiled thirty-one accounts. This year, fifteen other Assembly Members are participating and all together we have collected eighty-one stories from Holocaust Survivors. The essay collection has been included in libraries of the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, in Israel's Holocaust museum Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C.

As the essay collection grows, so has the ceremony. Initially, a few Survivors where invited to observe the ceremony from the Gallery. I have invited Survivors from my district to attend the ceremony at the Capitol and be honored on the Assembly Floor. Last year, Survivors sat alongside Assembly Members at their desks. Since I have presided over the ceremony, a Survivor has given a keynote address to the entire Assembly describing their experiences during the Holocaust and encouraging others to continue the work of the project.

I have been honored for the opportunity to create, sustain and grow this project. As it is my final year in the Assembly, I feel confident that my fellow Assembly Members will continue to embrace the vision of the project and of California Holocaust Memorial Week. I am touched that the stories of so many Survivors have been passed on to the next generation. Surely, it is a lesson they will never forget and they will oppose tyranny, oppression and genocide in all of its forms and work for a day when we can say this will never happen again.

Warmest regards,

Rebecca Cohn

REBECCA COHN

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A downloadable version of this essay collection and the collections from previous years is available on Assemblymember Cohn's website at http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a24/.

Helga Benjamin Eagle

by Jessica Solomon

It all began when Helaine Green and I arrived at Helga Eagle's beautiful home in Los Gatos. I was nervous, but when Helga opened the door and invited us in she made me feel comfortable and my anxiety vanished. Helga is very sweet and warm. She has a great sense of humor and is very easy to talk to.

Helga Benjamin was born in East Prussia, Germany in the village of Taulensee on June 14, 1926. She and her parents, Selma nee Ascher and Sally (Sol) Benjamin, were the only Jews in their town. In fact, the Benjamin family had resided in this village for over 100 years and had always been the only Jews there. The Benjamins owned a guesthouse that served as the community's general store. The property was also a working farm with animals.

In 1916, ten years before Helga's birth, Sol Benjamin went to America to bring his oldest sister to Louisville, Kentucky. He had intended to stay in the United States, but was called back to Germany a few months later, after his father died. His three brothers and one other sister had all left Taulensee for larger cities in Germany, and Sol had had to return to manage the family business. World War I was raging at the time so Sol and his brothers were all drafted to serve in the German army.

Nine years later, in 1925 Helga's parents got married. Helga's mother, Selma, had grown up in Danzig, but moved to Taulensee upon her marriage.

Despite the fact that they were the only Jews in their small village, the Benjamins were very observant, relying on the larger Jewish population of the neighboring city of Gilgenburg for their religious community. Helga and her parents walked to synagogue in Gilgenburg every Saturday (a distance that seemed like 20 miles to a small child) and rode the horse and buggy home after Shabbat ended on Saturday night. They kept strictly kosher, obtaining their meat from the shochet in Gilgenburg. Life in Taulansee was good for the family until the Nazis came to power.

In 1935, the Nazis confiscated the Benjamins' property and business. They decreed that Jewish children could not go to school. Those who did attend school were isolated. Helga was forced to sit on the Juden Banck (the Jew bench). Since she was the only Jew in the school, she had to sit there all alone and no one was allowed to talk to her, even her teacher. It was a way of pressuring her not to return to the classroom. Helga's parents were also isolated from the community. They were forced to live in one room of their house, and were given only a few animals with which to fend for themselves. They had no way of

earning a living. The Nazis, former friends and neighbors, took over the rest of the house and property. No one spoke to Helga's parents either.

The Benjamins decided to send Helga to live with her grandparents in Danzig, which was still a relatively safe city. There she attended the Rosenbaum Schule, a famous Jewish school. Meanwhile, her parents focused all their energies on finding a way to leave Germany. They wrote to every relative they could think of who might be able to help them get a visa. In 1937, an uncle and cousins in American came to their rescue. Getting a visa for Selma proved particularly challenging, since she fell under the U.S. immigration quota for Poland. Once the visas arrived the Benjamins had only 10 days to make arrangements to leave Germany before their passports expired. Fortunately they were able to book passage from Antwerp, Belgium to Hoboken, New Jersey. Helga's mother's sister came with them. The rest of the extended family had to wait.

Helga and her family arrived in Hoboken on June 7, 1937, and one week later, Helga celebrated her 11th birthday. Because so many Jews were entering New York, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) offered to make travel arrangements for any immigrants who had relatives elsewhere in the country Luckily, Sol's older sister still lived in Louisville, where she had gotten married and started a family. Helga, Selma, Sol and Helga's aunt reached her safely by the end of 1937. In Louisville Sol found work as a dishwasher, Helga's mother and aunt cleaned houses. They also earned money by taking in boarders. Helga attended school. The family spent every spare moment trying to find Americans to sponsor their relatives who remained in Germany. Their efforts were mostly successful. Everyone but Sol's younger sister and her family, and Helga's aunt and cousin on her mother's side of the family, managed to evade Auschwitz and reach the United States.

The family remained in Louisville until 1940, when Helga's parents and several aunts and uncles decided to move to Los Angeles. They bought a small grocery store in Long Beach. But like the Japanese, people of German origin in California were classified as "enemy aliens." Fortunately, unlike the Japanese, they were not interned in camps. But, they had to obey a curfew and could not leave their homes from 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM. They also had to turn in their cameras and short wave radios to the government. At that time, the grocery store was subdivided into three parts, a grocery, a butcher shop and a vegetable store. Unfortunately, the butcher was drafted into the American army and the vegetable man was Japanese, so he was sent to an internment camp. It became impossible for Helga's father to run the business properly and make a living with these two men gone. So the family decided to move to Los Angeles. For this 35-mile move they needed the authorization of the California government. As enemy aliens they were only allowed to travel 25 miles without permission.

Helga's family opened another grocery store and in 1942 they became citizens. They immediately voted for their hero, Franklin Roosevelt. In fact, they didn't know any Republicans! But the grocery business remained difficult. Everything was rationed, and people could only make limited purchases until the war ended in 1945. The rules regarding

enemy aliens were lifted in December 1942, although Japanese Americans remained interned in camps.

Helga attended four different high schools before graduating from Los Angeles High School in 1945. From there she attended UCLA for two years and studied child psychology. But her college career was interrupted when her father became ill and died of cancer. She and her mother sold the store.

Helga became very involved in the Zionist movement in Los Angles. In that way she met her first husband, Joe Wertheim, who volunteered for Masada, a Zionist organization that smuggled guns to the Jews of Palestine. Sadly, Joe died seven months later of a previously undiagnosed heart condition, leaving behind a pregnant Helga. Life as a single mother in those days was very difficult. Fortunately Helga met her second husband, Sam Eagle, a few years later. They got married and had two children. In 1964 Sam bought a beauty supply business in San Jose, where they raised their family. Helga takes great pride and joy in her five grandchildren.

Helga feels tremendous residual guilt as a survivor of the Holocaust, knowing how lucky she was to have escaped the suffering of the camps that so many Jews were forced to experience. But she did suffer as the victim of terrible discrimination who was forced to leave her home for reasons she could not understand. She says you were either stuck or you were lucky. Everything depended on whether or not you could find someone to vouch for you.

Her experiences gave her tremendous empathy for anyone who faces discrimination, so Helga gave me some advice. She told me to be aware and speak up, to be an individual and fight for my freedom. I took that to heart, because if we don't have our freedom and basic rights, what do we have? I realize things are easy for me now, but what happened to Helga could happen again. Being with Helga and talking to a person who had to endure her painful experiences reminds me to be thankful now for what I have. I will always stand up for what I believe in and for my freedom.

Tamara Brandman Noten

by Arielle Cole

"This is my mother and father [Hannah and Shaya Brandman]. I believe I was six years old," Tamara points to an aged portrait of her younger self and her family, "This is all I have of my parents before the war." Tamara Brandman Noten was born on November 15, 1930 in Odessa, Ukraine, which, at the time, was part of the U.S.S.R. Odessa was a beautiful open port city with a diverse population on the Black Sea. As the only place where Jews were allowed to live, Jewish culture thrived. There were Jewish writers, musicians, and lawyers. But the more Jews became involved in civic life, the more they were hated.

Tamara described her childhood as difficult. Her family was poor and they were often hungry. However, they hardly felt the social impact of being poor because their neighbors were also poor. Her grandparents tried to help her family out as much as possible. Tamara was happy whenever she got an education. When she was about seven, she went to a school of art where she had the opportunity to perform on stage. Since then, she has been involved with the arts all her life.

Tamara was 10 when World War II started. She did not quite understand what the war was about but she knew people were scared. In early June 1941, Jewish refugees fleeing Poland started arriving in Odessa. The Communists were afraid, and Jews were even more frightened. Tamara's parents started to talk about leaving Odessa.

One dark night in July, Tamara and the other children in her neighborhood were playing in the streets. Her mother wasn't home yet. At exactly six o'clock, there was a giant BOOM and the bombings from the Germans began. All the children, including Tamara, were running through the streets crying out, "*Mama!"* Tamara eventually found her mother, who was running home from work, trying to find her daughter. For the next month and a half, with expected German punctuality, the bombings would start at six o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the afternoon and ten o'clock in the evening. Most of the houses in Tamara's neighborhood were destroyed. Fortunately, her own house survived the continuous bombardment. All the tenants from Tamara's housing complex went into their basements. Tamara and the other children would fill cotton stockings with sand and put them around the windows to protect them from shattering. From July to August they lived like this. The government did nothing for the Jews, neither helping to relocate them, nor even warning them of the great danger they faced.

An opportunity to leave Odessa presented itself through a friend of Tamara's uncle who was the Russian captain of a cargo ship. Her uncle convinced his friend to take six of their family onboard the ship, Kalinin. Kalinin was a cargo ship that transported manufacturing

equipment for cameras and other photography supplies. The Soviet Union had only one manufacturing plant for this equipment, so the government wanted to be sure that the goods were transported safely. The Nazis by that time were surrounding the area from the ground and the sea. Since Tamara and her family were illegal stowaways, they had to wait to board until the ship was fully loaded, which took a long time since the port was under constant bombardment. Tamara's family was forced to wait in the cold city. Each day, the people getting them onto the ship would say, "tomorrow, tomorrow" they would board. Five days later, in the beginning of August, Tamara, her mother, father, grandmother (on her mother's side), and her uncle's wife and son, finally boarded the Kalinin. Tamara's cousin was three years older than she. He played the violin and together they used to put on shows during which he would play and she would narrate. By this time, all of Romania was occupied, which meant that the Nazis were just across the sea from Odessa, posing ever greater danger.

Other families were also stowed away onboard the small ship. Each family set up their own area in the cargo hold, in between the storage containers. The children would play with the little marbles that fell out of the boxes from the film equipment when those boxes on the deck of the ship were destroyed by bombings. When the ship left port, there was one ship ahead of them, the Lenin that also carried refugees. The distance between the two ships was considerable enough that while looking at one ship, an enemy could not see the other. The Germans bombed the Lenin, sinking it, killing everybody on board. But they were not aware of the Kalinin so Tamara and the stowaway refugees on her ship escaped.

After six days of travel on the Kalinin through the Black Sea and the Azov Sea, Tamara and her family ended up at Mariupol in the Ukraine. Nobody there expected or accepted the Jewish refugees. The people of Mariupol did not think about what the Jews were trying to escape from, just the danger that the Jews inherently brought with them. The people of Mariupol did not want the Jews to sleep in their ports so they loaded them onto cargo trains to Kharkov. There was no water, food, or medical care on these trains. The refugees were able to procure water at a few stops, but there were no toilets. Young and old had to sleep on the floor. Nobody knew anybody else, and everyone came from different places. People were helpless and hopeless. "Nobody was trying to kill us, but it was very easy to die," Tamara recalls. The Nazis began to bomb Mariupol in the middle of September.

On their cargo train, Tamara's family was given two choices: Go to hot Uzbekistan, or to cold Ekaterinburg, Siberia. Tamara's mother chose to go to Siberia because Tamara had asthma, and she felt that environment would be better for her daughter's health. Ekaterinburg, which is now an industrial city, was at the time set up as a center for war evacuees. The government separated them into villages so there would be less trouble. Because Tamara's father was skilled in manufacturing from his previous job, they were sent to a village where there were textile factories that specialized in soldier uniforms. Most men had to go into the army, but Tamara's father was exempt from this requirement because he was born with a heart defect. He eventually had to stop working in the factory because he was getting sick from the dust and lack of ventilation. He then found a job as

a bookkeeper at a school. The people of Ekaterunburg were given little estates where they would grow their own food. Tamara's family stayed in a room of one of these houses. They were given very little portions of food. They lived in Siberia for about three years from September 1941 to November 1944. Tamara's family returned to Odessa on her birthday, November 15. Alas, it was not an easy return.

On October 7, 1941, the Germans had occupied Odessa. All the people who were defending Odessa were killed within the first 100 days, including Tamara's uncle who had procured the ride for them on the cargo ship. When the Nazis came to Tamara's family's old neighborhood, their neighbors reported her uncle was a communist, so the Nazis shot him on the spot. During the occupation, all of Tamara's remaining family was killed. The government wouldn't let any evacuees back into the city unless they received a telegram inviting them to come back to Odessa from their relatives living there. This, obviously, would not work for Tamara and her family. Demonstrating the daring of women during war, Tamara's mother bribed a postal service worker into sending them a phony telegram from their relatives. There was still one more problem; train tickets were expensive, and Tamara's family had very little money. To earn money for the tickets home, they planted potatoes and sold them in the market. When they finally made enough money, Tamara, her mother, father and grandmother returned to a war-ridden Odessa.

When they came back to their old flat they found someone else living in it. Since Odessa was in a communist country, this was expected because no one actually owned anything, so it technically wasn't *their* flat. Tamara's family was forced to sleep on the steps of their old home. While living on the streets, they looked for their family, but found out that they had all been killed. By chance, Tamara's mother ran into a friend of a friend of a friend who had been able to obtain a flat with three rooms because he was an officer of the army. One room was for his family, another for his daughter's family and the third he offered to Tamara's family. Even though Tamara and her family were home, World War II was still raging on. All the windows had to be blacked out and all the lamps' light bulbs were replaced with blue light bulbs. Odessa was still a scary place to live, but at least it was home.

Tamara lived in Odessa until 1982 when she immigrated to Lithuania. In January 1988, she immigrated to the United States to Los Angeles. Tamara had applied to emigrate in 1978, but she kept getting refused. While waiting to be approved, both Tamara's mother and father died because they were weakened by the war. Within that time, Tamara married Nukhim Noten, a mechanical engineer, and they had one son named George. The couple met in 1951 at a concert where he played the violin and Tamara did the announcements. They were married the following year. When Tamara and her family were finally approved for emigration, they couldn't leave right away because the government required that émigrés renovate their flats before they left. Also, ten days prior to leaving, the government turned off the electricity. Tamara told her son to leave first with his family so they would not have to live without those comforts because his wife was eight months pregnant. George went to Israel, where his daughter, Liat was born. He eventually got a job in the United States

in San Jose, California. Tamara moved to San Jose to be closer to her son and his family. Tamara's husband, Nukhim, died of a stroke in 2003.

Even though Tamara insisted that her story is not as relevant to the remembrance of the Holocaust as that of those who were in concentration camps, I feel that it is. Understanding that Jews were persecuted in the Soviet Union is very important. Tamara's family and many others experienced the tragedies of war through hunger, death and destruction. Realizing that bombings, occupation, and death could occur in such a lively city like Odessa is a definite reminder to those of us who take our security for granted in this time and place. It is important to know that many Jews died because people were unwilling to help them. Tamara's story is vital in remembering the tragedies that occurred during the Third Reich in Germany.

Henry Estreicher

by Andrea Herman

The Rise and Fall of a Fighter

In a lifetime most people will go through the rise and fall of their own soul, but the era that Henry endured was one that held more importance than perhaps any other. Youth today hear about the Holocaust and the devastation it brought onto the planet, but in speaking to Mr. Estreicher I was able to see what hardships survivors faced, something I hope never to experience in person.

Henry Estreicher was born into a religious family on May 5, 1926 in the small town of Myszow, Poland. Myszow was a predominantly gentile community, and Jews comprised approximately 5% of the population. Before the war, the Jews and non-Jews were very close, and shared the same grocery stores, schools, and neighborhoods. Though the town had only 900 Jewish families and only seven factories, it was and will always be a place Henry calls home.

Henry's mother was a housewife who took care of nine children - five brothers and four sisters, and his father was a rabbi. He had a loving and religious family who attended religious school and synagogue on a regular basis.

One night in September 1939, when Henry was 13 years old, his life was changed forever. The Germans closed his school. His principal was forcibly taken from the school, as was his uncle. Their bloodied clothing was all that returned.

From 1939 until 1942 Henry and his family remained together in Myszkow, forced to work without pay for the Germans. In 1942, Henry and his family were sent to the Zawiercie Ghetto. In June 1943, the ghetto was liquidated and all of the Jewish people there were forced to assemble in one place to await the trains. Overflowing with Jewish people, to the point of suffocation, old people died in the cattle cars provided for their transportation. The head of the Jewish community of the Zawiercie Ghetto, who dared to shout out to the Germans, "You can't treat people like this," was shot and thrown in a cattle car to die among the living. Within the next three hours they were all transported to Birkenau. Once the cattle train stopped, everyone who was still alive, and who could walk, got off.

During those first treacherous days in the concentration camp Henry went through much heartache. Upon his arrival the Nazis separated people into categories of men and women, young and old. Henry's entire family was paraded in front of Mengele and ordered to move into lines either to the left or to the right. His brothers and he were separated from

his father, who was put in a line for the older men. That day that he and his brother were separated from the rest of his family was the last time they ever saw them. The Germans murdered two hundred of Henry's family members - including his father, his mother, and siblings.

Henry and his brother, Srul Yizhak, remained in Birkenau, tortured for five months. That first day, they were forced to remain standing in one place until evening, waiting to have a number tattooed onto their forearms, and for clothing – small sizes for large people, large sizes for small people, all to humiliate them. Mengele would come periodically to inspect them at Birkenau, sending the sickly to the crematorium. Within five months, all were sent to Auschwitz. After two days in Auschwitz, groups again were formed. In December 1943, Srul Yitzhak, was sent to the coalmines and Henry, to the Warsaw Ghetto.

In the Warsaw Ghetto, Henry had no clothes to change into, no underwear, and he lived in filth. He spent his days doing the same things over and over again, waking up at 4:00 a.m. slaving under the harsh watch of Nazi soldiers. The ghetto was terrible for Henry, with very little and very sickening food, feeble beds, and hard slave labor laying bricks. While in the ghetto, Henry met Yosef, a boyhood friend from Myszcow, with whom he had gone to school. As the European Jewish community was dispersed, separated from family and neighbors, and placed into concentration camps and ghettos with others whose language differences made communication very difficult, such a meeting was miraculous. Together, each helped the other to survive.

In June of 1944, the Russians had surrounded the outskirts of Warsaw. The Poles then rebelled. The Nazis loaded Henry, and all who remained in the ghetto, onto cattle cars and transported them to Dachau. In Dachau they were segregated again and given something to eat. Henry and others selected, were then sent to Mildorf to work as slaves in an underground German airplane factory. Again, they were given no underwear, only a shirt, pants and a jacket. Only this time, showing a bit of mercy, those who received ill-fitting clothing, were allowed to exchange them amongst the other Jewish slaves.

In April 1945, Henry and all of the Jewish slave laborers of Mildorf were again forced into cattle cars, and transported by train for 14 days, without food or water. They were headed for a hidden place in the mountains where they were all to be killed. While Henry and his fellow prisoners remained scared and dying within the confines of the car, American troops, thinking that the train was carrying German soldiers, fired upon it with machine guns. Henry, and the Jewish prisoners waved pieces of their striped clothing at the planes, and the planes went away. Many Jewish prisoners were mistakenly killed by this accident. On April 29, 1945, General George Patton and his armored tank corps crossed the railroad and stopped the train, liberating Henry and all who remained alive within the cars.

Later that year Henry went back to Poland, searching for members of his family and for his home. Finding no one alive, and learning of the murder by their Polish neighbors, of a brother and sister who had been fighting in the underground in Russia, and who had

returned to Poland to reclaim their home, Henry decided to flee his homeland and return to a German camp for displaced persons.

In late 1949, Henry came to the United States. He had found a long lost uncle in Philadelphia. They shared stories and got to know each other. He stayed in Philadelphia for less than a year. Henry then moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In April 1951, Henry was drafted. Trained at Fort Knox, Kentucky to fight in Korea, Eisenhower made a sudden peace deal and Henry was sent to Germany as a corporal in the American Army. Upon discharge from the military Henry had many jobs in Milwaukee, until he purchased a grocery store with his brother, Sam, who arrived in the United States sometime after him. Seven years later, he married and moved from his home in Wisconsin, with his wife and two children, to California, where he managed a liquor store and a grocery store.

Presently, Henry lives in Redwood City, with his wife and two sons. His only living brother, Sam, lives in Mountain View. Though he has traumatic dreams about his family and the Holocaust almost every night, he survived and knows that he is strong.

Henry Estreicher is one of the people I respect most in my life, for all he has gone through, and all he has to live with and without. No one, including me, will ever know the devastation and heartache that Henry experienced, and most people will only live with the memory of hearing the stories told by others like him.

Helen Farkas

by Anna Matvey

Helen Farkas was born in 1920; her parents were Frieda and Chaim Safar. She was born and raised on the border of Romania and Hungary in Transylvania. She had eight siblings, five brothers and three sisters. The family kept a kosher household and observed high holidays. Helen's father was in the shoe business, while her mother was busy raising nine children at home. They lived in a big house with a vegetable garden and fruit orchard in the yard. Gradually during her childhood her siblings moved out, until it was just Helen, her parents, and her brother Andor.

In 1940, the Hungarians took over Transylvania. After this, the oppression of the Jews began. Little by little their freedoms were restricted. In 1943 they were told to move to the ghetto, completely isolated from other Hungarians. Jewish kids were thrown out of school, and the Jews had to wear the yellow star of David, and jobs were lost. Five to six families had to live together in a part of the ghetto. Electronics such as radios were prohibited. The Germans didn't want the Jews to find out what was happening in the world. In 1944 they were told to pack a few belongings, and someone had to push them in small cattle carts. All the people had to stand since there were no benches or anything. Children were crying everywhere. Instead of bathrooms they used buckets, people were very thirsty, and the smell was very strong. It took three days to get to Auschwitz in Poland.

Their first thoughts when arriving was that it was a factory (they saw chimneys, big buildings, etc.), but then they saw men in striped clothes who pushed people from the carts *[again, is this train cars, or really carts].* Helen and Ethel (her sister) were pushed to one side and her parents and parents- in-law, and Ethel's little son were pushed to another (the side that was supposed to die). As Helen looked at her mother she would never forget the expression on her mother's face. Ethel and Helen were sent to the bath where they bathed and had their hair cut. They were given rags to put on. Dr. Joseph Mengele was the one who decided who lived and who died; only the young and strong survived.

Helen's niece had polio and knee surgery. As a result of the surgery she had a very big scar and would have been sent to the gas chambers if Dr. Mengele saw. They were there at Auschwitz but could not believe they were there to die. Only people aged seventeen to thirty-five were left to work and all the rest were killed. All had to stay in rows of five people. Helen's main concern was to help her niece hide from selection (the periodic inspections), because she was sure she would be sent to the gas chambers.

In October of 1944, all the inmates of Auschwitz were taken to Silesia, where many died of starvation, frostbite, and infections. On the twenty-first of January they started

the death march. They picked food from under the snow on their way. The healthiest had to push the barrels (given to them by the Germans) and help the sick people. People who could not walk were shot. Many including Helen had lice and Ethel had typhoid. People had to lie on the snow for rest/sleep.

By March, Ethel and Helen decided to escape, but they had signs on their clothes of KL (German initials meaning "concentration camp." However, it was not possible to escape all together. It was decided that Miriam (their older sister) and her daughter would try to escape, but they were brought back to the rest of the group by villagers. It was lucky that they weren't shot; perhaps the Nazis at that time were tired of killing. Finally, one day Helen and Ethel were able to escape. After escaping they knocked at a house in the forest and with the help of a girl that lived in the house, they made it to Czechoslovakia.

When arriving in Czechoslovakia they acted like Hungarians because they knew the language and people wouldn't suspect they were Jews. They survived until the liberation by Americans and Czechs. One day they saw a man with the star of David on his head who was captain of the unit from America. Arrangements were made for them to go away with other prisoners who were just liberated from prison. Helen and Ethel were told not to go back to Transylvania and were told that they could stay in America with everything they needed. However, they needed to go back home, and they did. They were reunited with Helen's fiancé, Joe.

Helen and Joe were married and were able to come to the U.S. by 1949. Now they belong to the local temple, where they can freely observe the Jewish religion. Helen began telling her life story to students in schools around the Bay Area. She says that she decided to write a book about her life because the students and teachers asked her to. "They told me to write my story so it could be passed on to other generations."

My experience interviewing Mrs. Farkas had many different aspects. It was very upsetting to hear in more detail what had been done to the Jewish race, but on the other hand it was important to know. I believe that Helen Farkas' story should be told and retold. She is a brave woman with a past that is worth recognizing. I enjoyed my time with her.

Lenci Farkas

by Barry Rosekind

Lenci Farkas comes from the town called Kiralyhaza in Hungarian and known as Kralovo Nad Tisou in Czech. The town had 5,000 inhabitants when the Jews were deported from their homes. Of those 5000 people, there were 120 Jewish families. The village Lenci comes from was part of Hungary for a thousand years, up until twenty years after WW1, when it was given to the Czechs.

Lenci's father was born when their village was part of Hungary. He was a successful businessman. He was a builder and owned a lumber yard. He built many homes and buildings, including the synagogue in their village. Later, he also owned a bank and loaned money to people to build their homes and other buildings.

Lenci was the youngest of six children. She had five older sisters. Her mother died when she was a baby and her father remarried when she was three and a half years old. Her stepmother had a daughter, Isabelle, who was twelve and half, nine years older than Lenci. Her father and stepmother had two children together. Lenci now had seven sisters and a brother.

When Lenci began school as a child, people did not speak Czech; her first language is Hungarian. She also speaks Yiddish, although Hungarian Jews typically didn't speak Yiddish. Children learned Czech because that was the language spoken at school. Hungarian was the language spoken at home. One could still find Hungarian spoken; for instance, if you went to the city hall, people still spoke Hungarian.

Her family was well off and lived in a large home. Notably, they had an indoor toilet besides having an outhouse. Not many families at that time had an indoor toilet.

Although they had a radio, they were not supposed to listen to world news or politics, only local news, and music, and such. While they didn't hear it on the radio, they knew something was going on. Word comes around…

Germany divided Czechoslovakia, and Hitler gave Czechoslovakia back to the Hungarians. They lived peaceful lives under the Hungarians until the Germans completely occupied their village in 1944, and the men were taken to forced labor camps. They were some of the last deported. Just like that they were deported. One day they were told to gather anything they could carry, but not too much, and to congregate at the synagogue. All the Jews in their village were confined in the synagogue - young, old, sick people; with no food and no access to a bathroom, as there was only an outhouse. They were locked

in overnight, and couldn't get to the outhouse until the morning – all those people and one outhouse. The neighbors did nothing; they didn't try to throw food over the fence or anything. The Jews came to recognize that the gentiles were glad to get rid of them. Lenci's father built the synagogue, so he knew every part of it. He told her about a place she could hide when everyone was taken from there, but she refused to be separated from her whole family.

In 1944, after Pesach, they were taken to a ghetto for a short time. Lenci had a boyfriend, who was taken out of the ghetto to work, and on her birthday he brought her a half of a loaf of bread. It was the best birthday present ever. A few days after Lenci's birthday, the ghetto was liquidated, and they were taken to the train station where they were crammed into train cars, cattle cars. They were in the train car for three or four days. There was a bucket that was used by everyone - in front of everybody. There was a window in the train car they were in, and people tried to empty the bucket out the window. When the train stopped, and someone yelled in German, "get out", they were happy to get out of the train from that miserable trip – not knowing what they faced. They had arrived at Auschwitz. A worker outside the train – a Jew who had been there a long time, risking his life, very quietly told people to give their children to someone. Mengele was there and separated them, and if you were with a baby or small child, you went to the left side right away; you weren't spared. Lenci's step-sister, Isabelle - in German said, "I am a married woman. I want to go with my mother. Why separate us?" They had no idea what went on. Mengele responded to Isabelle, "Can you run? Run!" Isabelle was pushed to the other side. They didn't see their parents again. They shaved their hair – their heads, pubic hair, underarms – dehumanized them, made them feel they were nothing. They threw clothes to them that weren't theirs – tall women were given short dresses, short women with a dress much too large. Prisoners traded and ended up with something to wear. They had a shower. Cold water. No towel. Clothes dried on you. They were forced to stand in line for long periods of time for the "appel," to be counted. And they were sent to barracks – 10 of them to a bunk. There was somebody in charge, a Jewish woman; she was seasoned, already there for years. They didn't know where their parents were. When they asked her, she pointed to the burning chimneys. At first it didn't sink in. They couldn't believe it.

One day Lenci had a potato. She had made a fire and was roasting it, not remembering now how she came upon these things. Everyone came around watching her good fortune, envious of her potato. Then suddenly everybody dispersed. There stood a woman SS guard. She was a beautiful blonde woman, and she took Lenci into a little room. Everybody thought that was the end of her, including Lenci. She said to Lenci, "do you know what is coming to you for what you have done?" Lenci said to her, "how could someone as beautiful as you do something like this?" Lenci doesn't know where this came from. From god? Maybe there is god or was god. At that time, she says they didn't believe very much that there was a god. But somehow it came to her to say this. And the woman smiled at her and spared her. The guard told her not to tell anyone what happened there. She kept very quiet about it as eating extra food was a no no. She was lucky.

Lenci became very ill with scarlet fever. She was so ill and delirious with an ear infection and high fever, and with no medication. Twice a day they were forced to line up for the appel, counting. Her sisters held her up, and they stood almost in the back of the row so they couldn't be seen well. She would have collapsed if they didn't hold her. She made it through, and finally recovered from that, although she suffered permanent damage and hearing loss. After a couple weeks, skin starts peeling after scarlet fever. They were all brought before Dr. Mengele, and told to walk in front of him without their clothes on. When it was Lenci's turn, she held her clothes in front of herself to hide the peeling skin on her stomach. Dr. Mengele called her back to look at her. "You, you, you come back." He told her to take the clothes away from hiding herself. She thought this would be the end of her. He didn't notice. And again, she was somehow spared. She had been lucky.

Lenci and most of her family were no longer together anymore. But she was still with her step-sister Isabelle, another sister Elsa, and a niece, Lilly. It was 1945, and they could hear the planes. And she didn't care if they were bombed. Her family had been divided. "Can you imagine?"

They started the death march leaving Auschwitz. No reason. "What would happen if they left us there and the Russians liberated us? We weren't worth anything to them." It was the end of January in the middle of winter. They were very cold and very hungry. They were walking, and there were Germans watching them. If someone stopped, they could be killed. They saw a field of sugar beats, and they ran to the fields to eat, not caring if they were shot. They were so hungry. The Germans shot their guns into the air. They were beating people who stopped walking or who ran to the field. Isabelle was hurt by one of the soldiers hitting her. Germans didn't want to be liberated by the Russians. The villages were evacuated as they marched. Lenci and the other two, Elsa and Lilly, decided to take a chance and run to hide. Isabelle was hurt, and told Lenci to leave her. Lenci persuaded her to move and come with her. They stayed together, and hid in a sty. Nobody saw them, and they ate seeds found on the ground. They ate anything they could. Seven of them, others joined them, all girls, found an abandoned house, and climbed into a window. They looked around and ate anything they could find. They found lard, and ate it, and all got sick. They had nothing in their stomachs, and the lard made them very sick. And right away they got rid of the clothes from Auschwitz, which were regular clothes with a stripe down the back, and replaced them with clothes they found in the abandoned house. If they ventured from the house, they always divided. If some were caught, some would still be safe. They became a little braver and went outside during the day. The girls saw a guy riding a bicycle, and they started running. When he caught up with them, this non-Jewish Ukrainian, they told him they were Czechs; they never would say they were Jews. They told him they worked in a factory that was bombed.

This Ukrainian man had been drafted to work on the German farm because the German men who lived there were all in the army. He offered the girls work on the farm, and they agreed. He knew where they were staying. He offered them food, and the girls had to work in return, milking cows, although none of them knew how. One day, he told them the

Germans were returning that the Russians were defeated. Now what would they do? They persuaded the guy to let them stay, and he was uneasy about it. It was the end of January, and they slept hiding in the hay. Early in the morning, they awoke and looked outside where they saw an SS guy with a gun talking to this man. He was talking to the SS man and pointing to the girls hiding in the barn. That guy had seen the transport go by and knew who the girls were. Lenci saw that the guy minded turning them in. They watched the SS guy coming to the silo where they were hiding. One of the girls wasn't from their area, and she talked German to the German guy, so they didn't have to speak and reveal their Yiddish German. The SS asked them who they were and said they couldn't survive there. He asked if they were willing to work on the farm, and he let them work because he needed help. Perhaps he was a human German. A day or two later the Russians defeated the Germans, and came into the village. Life under the Russians was not easy. They told the girls that if they wanted to stay, they would have to work.

This was at the front and there were Russian soldiers around. A girl had joined them. She was sixteen and had been in Theresienstadt for a number of years since she was perhaps twelve years old. She had flirted with one of the soldiers. She was naïve and had no idea she shouldn't be doing that. One night some of the Russian soldiers broke into the house they were staying in. A soldier held a gun to this sixteen year old girl's head, and was going to rape her. The girls were screaming, and he couldn't do it. As this was the front, they had to leave. They were taken to a village where there were German women and children, and they could work. There was a Russian field hospital nearby, and they washed linens, anything, including used bandages.

On May 8th a Russian convoy came into the village and declared the war was over. They could understand Russian because they spoke Czech, which is a Slavic language. A guy said to them, "You girls, because you're Czech, you probably want to go with us." "Wow, did we want to go with them!" All seven girls went with them in their convoy.

They arrived in Prague the same day the President of Czechoslovakia, Benes, returned from exile in England. After liberation, Lenci returned to her home town. She saw a neighbor, a woman who in the past had praised Lenci's father, claiming how appreciative she was because she wouldn't have her home and all she had if it hadn't been for him. And now she didn't offer Lenci some dinner, some lunch, not even a piece of bread. And there were others in the town who expressed the same sentiments, but offered nothing. Lenci and others were given clothes by the Joint Distribution Committee.

Years later, with her grown children, Lenci returned to her hometown to visit. She was reluctant, but her children wanted to go. They travelled to her town from Budapest in a chauffeured car. She saw familiar people in her town. It seemed to her they thought she would give them money. She boasted how well they were doing in America to those people, those people who hadn't helped them. They could see she had started a new life and had succeeded, and that this was her family with her. When they left the town, Lenci's

son asked her what she thought. She didn't want to remember what it is now, but how it had been long ago.

Listening to this story was one of the most amazing experiences in my life. The hardships that Lenci went through are unbelievable and completely put things into perspective. Besides this being a humbling experience, it makes me proud to be a Jew, and a member of the religion that survived. I will never experience anything that was quite like the experience I felt when I listened to her story. Pure amazement.

Isaac Goldstein

by Arielle Tieger

The German attempt to exterminate the Jewish people during World War II, 1939-1945, was unprecedented in Jewish history. The Holocaust was a concrete plan to eradicate all the Jews in Europe. Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, was a large and powerful regime that had in its heart a plan for Aryans to be the master race. The German people, although well educated, followed Hitler blindly as he began his attempt to rule the world.

This is the story of one Polish Jew who survived the German invasion of Poland. His name is Isaac Goldstein, and he is the sole survivor of his family.

Mr. Goldstein courageously and graciously allowed me to hear his story and recount it here in honor of the friends and family he lost. I appreciate Mr. Goldstein's bravery in retelling these events, as it cannot be easy to recount the painful losses he endured. This history documents what happened to Mr. Goldstein and his family and the six million other Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

Isaac Goldstein was born on October 9, 1925 in the town of Knyzyn, Bialystok, where he lived with his three brothers and four sisters, Sonya, David, Joseph, Martol, Zlatka, Laizer, and Israel. His parents, David and Rose ran two businesses together, a deli and a grocery store. Growing up during that time Jewish children endured many hardships. They were told that Jews didn't belong and were constantly blamed for the death of Jesus.

"Life was hard," stated Mr. Goldstein. However, he also said, it wasn't all that bad; they weren't starving, they had clothes, they went to school and they had homes.

Friday for the Goldsteins and many other Jewish families was a special day. The whole family stayed home to celebrate a nice Shabbat dinner together. Mr. Goldstein will never forget one particular Friday night when his mother lost her wedding ring. When his father found out, there was a lot of screaming and yelling, but it was Shabbat, so the whole family sat down to a somber, tense dinner. When Isaac's father stood up to say the prayers and cut the challah, he felt something hard underneath the knife. When he tore the bread apart he found the ring. It seemed that it had come off when Isaac's mother was braiding the dough! What started out to be a very unhappy and quiet dinner turned into smiles and laughter.

During the year of 1939, Jews began to realize that anti-Semitism was becoming increasingly challenging, and started looking for ways out. One option was immigrate to what was then known as Palestine. In order to do this, however each person had to go through rigorous training and earn special qualifications. Mr. Goldstein's older sister was

one of the people who chose to go this route. Unfortunately, after she had completed all the necessary training and received all of her qualifications the British published the White Paper in 1939 and refused her permission to emigrate. Looking back on this Mr. Goldstein says, "It was the British who killed my sister."

The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and began to enforce very tight rules. All Jews were required to wear yellow stars in order to identify them. Any Jew caught not wearing the star was shot on the spot. The Germans periodically rounded up and murdered Jews. Isaac's brother was taken away one day along with many others. The Germans said that they would release the prisoners if the families gave them enough gold. Of course Isaac's mother gave up her beloved wedding ring in hope of rescuing her son, but the Germans had lied. They had already killed the prisoners. The gold simply went into German coffers.

Mr. Goldstein himself was nearly captured when the Germans collected thousands of Jews and forced them into a synagogue. Luckily, some German guards were momentarily distracted by attractive girls who were walking down the street, and Mr. Goldstein took the fleeting opportunity to escape. Later the Germans burned the synagogue to the ground with all of the 2000 people trapped inside.

Mr. Goldstein lost his father on February 5, 1943. The Germans had announced that they were going to transport 10,000 Jews out of the ghetto. Conditions there were very difficult. There was very little food and very little space to live. One family was forced to live in a one room 'house.' The Germans often raided the ghetto, collecting Jews to be deported. In a very courageous act, Isaac's father hid the family in a special spot in the house, but he didn't hide with them. When the Germans came Isaac's father stated that the rest of the family had already been taken, so they only captured him, unwittingly sparing the rest of the family. Mr. Goldstein remembers his mother asking, "Will anybody survive?"

Life was getting much worse for the Jews in Poland. The ghetto was liquidated on August 15, 1943. Mr. Goldstein was separated from his family and taken in a cattle car to a concentration camp. The conditions on the train were horrendous. The trapped Jews were given no water, no food, and were tightly packed together in the crowded car. Every time the train stopped the Germans would make the Jews carry their dead to the last car. They finally arrived at Treblinka, which was an extermination camp. However Treblinka was in the throes of an uprising that had resulted in half of the crematoria being destroyed. Therefore, half of the people who had been assigned to Treblinka were sent to Majdanek instead. Mr Goldstein was one of them. When he got there the people in charge called roll. They asked if anyone had any special trades. Luckily Isaac said he was a machinist, and that saved his life. He got to go to work instead of the alternative, which was going straight to the extermination camp.

At this point in the interview I asked Isaac if he had any hope and where it came from. He simply answered, "No, you lose everything. All you have is misery and hunger. You just try and stay alive".

When working in the labor camp he was forced to do various kinds of work from moving boulders and shoveling gravel to working as a machinist. While working, Isaac got a very bad infection in his leg. He went to the camp clinic, but there was absolutely no medication, just a doctor with no resources. The physician, Dr. Citron, had no choice but to slice open Isaac's leg with no pain medication and then wrap it in a dirty cloth. Dr. Citron survived and went on to become one of the top doctors in Israel.

The Nazis moved Mr. Goldstein at various times to a variety of camps and he eventually ended up at Auschwitz. When he got there he saw some French prisoners who couldn't face any more torment, commit suicide by grabbing the electrical barbed wire, the first of many horrors he witnessed there. At Auschwitz Isaac worked digging a ditch along the walkway to the crematorium. All day long he could see the flames and the smoke coming from the chimneys. He said he felt hopeless. "I witnessed people going without a stop into the crematoriums all day, everyday," he said.

Isaac was then transferred to another work camp, Buna Amnuvitz. This was where the chemicals for the crematoria were made. Luckily he discovered that his friend, Joe Pure, was in charge of giving out the striped uniforms and he was the head of the clinic there. Joe assured Isaac that while he was there he wouldn't experience hunger or thirst. Mr. Goldstein worked loading coal, which he didn't mind because this allowed him to stand in it and warm his feet.

On January 18, 1945 Auschwitz was liquidated. The Germans marched the prisoners away from the camps because they were trying to hide the atrocities they had committed. At the last minute Joe ran up to Mr. Goldstein and gave him a pair of shoes and told him to wear them whether or not they fit because they would save his feet from freezing. They fit perfectly. To this day, Mr. Goldstein credits Joe with saving his life because he never could have made it through the snow without those shoes. Many people died on that march for exactly that reason: they couldn't keep walking because their feet froze in the snow.

The final episode of this journey began with the Death March. While Mr. Goldstein was marching, a German soldier who was walking alongside him made Isaac carry his backpack. Isaac felt something soft in the pack and thought it might be food. He fell back in the line a little and to his luck found an entire loaf of bread and a whole roll of salami. He said he and the people around him had a "feast."

When the march was over the Germans put the remaining prisoners on a train for ten days until they finally arrived at some sort of underground cave or mine where they were required to dig into the mountain. Mr. Goldstein's job was to control the cart that carried the rocks out of the mine. Somehow the wagon tipped over and the Germans accused Isaac of sabotage. They locked him up and told him he was going to be hung. Fortunately the allies bombed this location and the Germans forced the Jews to start marching again.

There were only 400 prisoners left. The Germans marched them to the Baltic Sea and told them they were going to be put on a ship. Three ships were docked. One was a huge luxury liner, the Capa Cona. Isaac says it looked as beautiful as the Titanic. It was going to be used for transport. 3000-4000 Jewish prisoners were already on board. As they were being loaded onto small boats to be transferred to the larger ships, Mr. Goldstein was headed for the luxury liner, but a kapo took his place and Mr. Goldstein was sent to a much smaller, older ship, the Altena. The Altena had horrendous conditions. Isaac was sent to the bottom of the boat, which was filled with dead bodies, and waste. At this point Mr. Goldstein said he got very angry with himself. He thought he should have fought to keep his place on the Capa Cona, but he just gave up. A few moments after he was loaded onto the small ship he heard a large explosion. The Capa Cona had been bombed by the British Air Force. All but a very few perished. The kapo had inadvertently saved Mr. Goldstein's life by making a selfish attempt to save himself. The bombing of the Capa Cona was the largest loss of life in nautical history and its bombing, while obviously filled with prisoners, was never fully explained. The Germans had finally run out of places to hide and the allies forced them to surrender.

The war ended for Mr. Goldstein on May 3, 1945. He was 19 years old and had lost his entire family. But he had survived and by telling his story, bears witness for all of them. His courage and honor are a tribute to his family and the Jewish people.

Ida Gourevitch

by Talia Salzman

"Hello! Hello please come in come in," was how by Ida Gourevitch greeted me with a kiss. My mom and I sat down by the kitchen table as she told us her tale.

Ida was born in 1930 in Bessarabia, Romania, where she and her many fellow Jews spoke primarily Yiddish. Her childhood went rather well until the Soviet authorities took over in 1940. Most of the local Jews were delighted with the arrival of the Soviets and greeted them with flowers. They hoped for a happier future. But Ida's Uncle Matvey realized early on that the Soviets would not bring happiness to the Jews, and refused to greet them like that. He said, "We waited for the knight on the white horse, but instead he came on a black one."

Stalin issued the order to exile everyone who was an owner of a business or even a cow. People had to carry everything they owned in horse carts, and leave town within 24 hours. "It was a joke, because the regular Soviet clerk was making more money then the so-called business owner," she recalled. Many innocent people were arrested and exiled without cause. By 1941, war spread like wildfire through Romania, as it was consuming all of Europe.

Ida was a blonde girl full of life and blessed with a good family. When the war started on June 22, 1941 at 6:00 AM, pandemonium erupted as bombs fell everywhere. Ida's father, Israel, was drafted into the Soviet army. She and her family hid from the bombs for three weeks in the basement of their small home. People started evacuating the city in big crowds that moved toward the train stations.

The Germans entered Ida's village on July 17, 1941. Three days prior, Ida's family was heading to the train station when the bombing started again. That's when Ida got lost and was separated from her family. "My mother had two sisters, Leah and Eva. Both of them didn't want to evacuate and were staying behind because they didn't like the Soviets and thought the war would be over in two to three weeks." Ida, 11 years old at the time, went to her aunts' house and thought her mother, Nechama, would come get her. (During the bombing raids, a lot of people got lost. The only method of communication between families was through messages written on the railroad cars. The message would say: "Our train is going here, so and so, please meet us there."

Since Ida didn't go to the train station she stayed with her aunts. Three days later the Germans arrived in Kishinev. Shortly thereafter they issued an order requiring all the Jews

to gather at the lower part of the city. There they organized a ghetto surrounded by barbed wire. The arriving Jews crowded into buildings that had been destroyed by the bombs. It was summer, very hot, and infections spread. The Germans didn't allow anyone to bring food or provisions to the imprisoned ghetto dwellers. Some Romanians defied the ban and tried to help by secretly bringing food to their former Jewish neighbors. "A world is not without kind people," Ida reflected. Others, however, took advantage of the Jews in the ghetto by robbing them of their last pennies in exchange for food.

"I was always saying that I was saved by my mom's Russian friend," Ida tearfully recalled, as she spoke of Lisa, the cleaning lady. Lisa was a very sweet woman who always helped with Passover cooking and other holidays. Not only did Lisa bring food to Ida's mother's friends and relatives in the ghetto, but she also wrote a note saying that she would do everything she could to save them.

All the remaining Jews in the city of Kishinev were in the ghetto. But the ghetto existed for only a very short time. Before the winter the Jews were either exterminated or sent to slave labor camps in Ukraine. The young people were sent to work and the old people were killed behind the city. Many, including some members of Ida's family, were buried alive. "The ground was breathing." Anyone who wanted to dig them out would be shot and thrown in the ground as well.

With her blonde hair Ida didn't look Jewish so Lisa sent her a note that instructed her to stay close to an inter-married family in the ghetto. The father, who was not Jewish, planned to get his family out of the ghetto by bribing the Romanian officials who collaborated with the Germans. "I didn't want to go with this family; I wanted to stay close to my aunt and my cousins, Chuma and Oshka."

One evening, Ida's aunt told Ida to go with this family. Ida resisted and her aunt literally shoved her into the car as if it was Ida's destiny to survive and her aunt's to perish. Crying was not allowed so as not to betray anybody. Her aunt Leah promised Ida that if she went with this family she would meet her mother, but Ida couldn't imagine where. "I remember very vividly, that our car eventually stopped in the woods near Tiraspol, where partisans operated. It was late autumn and the walnuts were ripened." Everybody talked very quietly and the walnuts were falling around them. One of the partisan women cut off Ida's blonde braids. "I cannot forget this moment because my hair was my mother's pride and joy." The woman told Ida that the haircut was necessary to avoid lice. "I started living in the forest with these partisans, and there were thousands of kids like me." Ida considered herself fortunate to be alive.

Ida traveled from place to place with this family, hidden by strangers when the Germans were all around. After three months of living in the forest Ida ended up in a city called, Makhachkalah . It was a port on the Caspian Sea and it was not occupied by Germans at the time. The city was teaming with refugees. The streets were covered by people with bags and belongings hanging all over them. All the schools were filled with

refugees. The next destination for refugees was Central Asia. There were huge lines to get on the ferries going there. Ida didn't understand how she ended up in Makhachkala. She was emaciated and constantly hungry and spoke poor Russian. There were a lot of Jews from many places, everybody looking for their own countrymen. Ida asked about people from Kishinev. Someone directed her to a particular street and there she found her father, mother and pregnant sister, Feige.

Feige, Ida's eldest sister, had gotten married in January 1941 when she was 22 years old. Her mother had come to Makhachkala through Krasnodar, where she worked in the fields before fleeing the Germans. Ida's mom had an olive complexion and a big head of blond hair. Everyone told her that she looked Aryan enough and shouldn't be running from the Germans. Not only did Ida meet her mother and sister, but she met her father there as well. He had been released from the labor battalion because he was barely alive.

Finally their turn came to board the ferry to Krasnovodsk, Kirgizstan. Everyone was starving and food was scarce. When they docked at Krasnovodsk, Ida's mom saw a couple of soldiers eating some bread and told Ida to ask them for some. Ida had never done anything like this before, but she did as she was told. The memory still makes her cry. Ida's sister gave birth and named the baby Rosa. But everyone in this city was starving and there was nothing.

From Krasnovodsk the family shipped to Uzbekistan. The day after they arrived Ida's father passed away. People were starving and dying of typhus, which was spreading fast. Everyone was infested with lice. The hospital was overcrowded with people bumping against each other like logs. Feige was lying there delirious. Ida put on her warmest clothing and went down the road to get some milk for the baby, who was dying. But some men ran into her with a dog and the milk spilled on the ground, leaving Ida with nothing. That night Ida heard her mother moaning for something to drink, but she had nothing to give her mother, and she was so emotionally and physically exhausted that she couldn't even get to her mother's bed. The next morning her mother was dead. Ida's sister and six-week-old baby niece died too, and Ida was devastated. She had cradled her sister in her arms the night before her sister's death on May 31.

In order to survive, Ida sold her sister's wedding ring for a bag of apples. She also had to pay money to mourn for her sister, and was nearly raped by a red-haired man. While she was running away from this man, she spotted an orphanage. Although the orphanage she found only cared for boys, the staff took her in and gave her clothing, food, a shower, and a place to sleep. They told her she had to sleep in a closet pantry, but when she found out that her attacker worked there, she fled and slept on the dining room table, a public spot she hoped would keep her safe. "I saved myself from Hitler himself," she asserts.

The next day this scary, red-haired man, the only staff person available, walked her in the hot sun to the girl's orphanage near Uzbekistan. There the staff gave her candy and good food. An honest professor was in charge of the girls and treated them fairly. Ida stayed

at this orphanage for a few years. When Ida was 16 years old, they allowed her to change her name, but she refused.

Ida returned to Kishinev after the war with that professor whose name was Kuzma Nikolovich Kovalov hoping to find out what happened to her relatives. She learned that they had all perished in the ghetto. She also heard about a Jewish doctor in the ghetto who poisoned herself because she wasn't allowed to help anyone there. The professor's wife was a Russian woman name Antonina Nikolayevna who, amazingly, spoke Yiddish even though she wasn't Jewish. She was the daughter of a priest, but suffered because he had been killed, so she had a great deal of empathy for Ida. The professor and his wife adopted Ida. Ida later fell in love with a gentile man, but her adopted parents cautioned her about the relationship, saying, "Think Ida, he's not Jewish." Ida eventually married a Jewish man, Abraham Boris Gourevitch, with whom she lived for 43 years until he died. She immigrated to the United States seven years ago and married Leonid Segel. Despite the trauma and devastation she suffered during the Holocaust Ida says that these experiences have left her with a better outlook on life and a love to learn more each day.

George Heller

by Jeffrey Weiss

George Heller was born to a middle-class family in 1924 in Budapest, Hungary. His parents, Kálmán and Gizella Heller had three children. Both his brother István and his sister Kató were older. George was the youngest. His family belonged to a small synagogue, but he did not regularly attend services. One Friday night in the 1940s, when he did attend services at the Dohány Street Synagogue, the largest Jewish house of worship in Europe, the Hungarian Nazis threw a bomb at the exiting crowd. Luckily, George was not among the victims.

George's parents owned a printing plant that printed books and did commercial printing. His whole family worked in the plant. George and his brother István were both journeymen typesetters (compositors), and his sister worked in the office. From grades one to four, George attended the Hebrew day school of the Rabbinical Seminary and then he attended a gymnasium (secondary school) for grades five to twelve. Besides Hungarian, he learned to read, write and speak Latin, German, English, and some French, and also continued his Hebrew and Jewish studies at the gymnasium.

After World War I ended, Miklós Horthy assumed the leadership of Hungary and became "Governor for Life." He was an antisemitic ruler under whom the Hungarian Parliament passed the Law of *Numerus Clausus* (Closed Numbers) in 1920. The Law of Closed Numbers made it a law that universities could only accept six percent of the Hungarian Jews into their universities. This happened 13 years before Hitler came into power in Germany. When World War II broke out, Jews were put into special labor battalions, whose treatment was often harsh and brutal. George's brother was sent to the Eastern front, along with other Jews, and he perished in the battles of 1942.

Somehow the deportation of Hungarian Jews did not begin until March of 1944. Adolph Eichmann, who managed the entire process, did not deport the Jews from Budapest. The rest of the Hungarian Jews were rapidly deported, eighty to a cattle car.

Meanwhile, after graduating from the gymnasium with a diploma, George began a two-year apprenticeship program as a typesetter in the family print shop. During his years of apprenticeship, he was able to obtain one of the valued university spots, so he also attended the School of Economics at the University of Engineering and Economics. One semester into his studies, he could no longer continue, because he was inducted into the Hungarian labor battalion service, his unit located in Budapest.

Shortly before this happened, George's family was given one hour to leave their apartment, and move. Luckily, George's aunt lived in the next block, so the family, except

George's brother, who perished earlier on the eastern front, could move in with her and her family. This situation of forcing families together continued while the Ghetto in Budapest was being formed. By May 1944, George was a slave laborer in Budapest. A short while after this, George managed to attend the funeral of his father who died from "natural causes." When the Ghetto in Budapest was established, his sister went into hiding with false papers. She was caught and brutally murdered.

In the labor camp, George put out fires and loaded railroad cars. Loading the railroad cars consisted of carrying one hundred kilo (about 220 lbs) bags of flour on his back. George credits part of his survival to learning to lift with his leg muscles instead of bending his back. From his time at the camp, George became sick from a combination of dysentery and typhoid fever. Much to his good fortune, he was sent by his labor battalion to a hospital in Ujpest, on the outskirts of Budapest, to be treated for his sickness. After spending six weeks in the hospital, the doctors uncovered another highly contagious bacterium, so George had to stay another six weeks. This gave him more time to recuperate before returning to his backbreaking labor.

In the fall of 1944, the German forces needed labor help in Austria, so George's unit was deported to the Burgenland, Austria area, eighty to a box car. George spent about three days on the train in unsanitary conditions, without food or water. When they arrived at their destination, their group of one hundred fifty slave laborers was housed in a barn. The winter of 1945 was a bitter cold winter in Austria. Inside the barn there was no heat, sleeping quarters were about one foot wide up in the rafters, there was one faucet for the entire group, and the latrine for George's unit was only a ditch outside the barn. While in Burgenland, the job of George's unit was to build bunkers. Despite the poor and unsanitary conditions, escape was not an option. The guards were not the problem; it was the surrounding population that was.

The daily rations consisted of some warm liquid called coffee in the morning, some soup at lunch, and some bread and cheese or salami in the evening. There was no help for those who got sick. There was a doctor among the group, but there was no medication or facilities to treat the sick. Thus, by Passover of 1945, the initial group of one hundred fifty shrank to around one hundred. To combat the growing death rate, George and his counterparts developed a buddy system.

The end of March 1945 marked the first day of Passover and the beginning of a deadly march to the Danube River. George and his comrades celebrated Passover with song and a small piece of matzah, which a member of his unit somehow obtained. The march which started next day was their exodus from slavery, and indeed a bitter experience. George's unit marched for three days, sleeping in the night in the open air and marching during the day. They ate the grass that was in the fields. And if someone was too slow, or could not keep walking, the guards would shoot him or her and leave the person's body on the side of the road.

After reaching the Danube river, George's unit boarded a barge to take them further west. Although the guards were trying to get them food, there was none to be had.

The boat ride west lasted eight days. Luckily, George still carried his brother's Omega pocket watch. His buddy (from the buddy system) was able to exchange the watch for a loaf of bread, which was shared by George and three of his friends. Each day, they had a slice of bread, and George credits his survival to this fortune of good luck.

Once George's unit reached their destination, the people walked up a hill, and entered the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. George was convinced that a troop of German soldiers with machine guns would be waiting, but upon reaching the top, there were no machine guns. Instead of annihilation via gas or bullets, the Germans at this point in time, in April of 1945, relied on starvation and disease.

Because Mauthausen was overcrowded, George's unit was housed in large tents that each held hundreds of people. Every morning, those still alive carried the dead to the edge of the tents to be carried away. Any of the dead who had good shoes did not depart with them because shoes were a valuable asset to survival.

There was not much food in Mauthausen and nobody had to work. The morning task included carrying the dead to the edge of the tent, followed by a count of survivors. Every day, the numbers decreased. George remembers one incident when several of his friends (from the gymnasium in Budapest) were standing up and talking, all 21 year olds. When one of them questioned his own ability to survive, he fell to the floor and died. According to George, the most crucial element needed for survival was a firm conviction that one can and will try to survive the atrocities which plagued them.

George participated in one more fairly short march, from Mauthausen to the Gunskirchen Concentration Camp, near Wels, Austria. Here, the barracks were log cabins. The difference between Gunskirchen and Mauthausen was just people were dying faster. Finally, on May 5, 1945, the Gunskirchen guards started to disappear.

By the morning, mostly everybody who could walk had started on the long journey toward a new life. George and three friends left the camp late that morning and found some freshly planted potatoes. They ate the potatoes because it was food.

As they walked along the road, a jeep with American soldiers was approaching. George recalled that when one of the soldier's saw them, he said: "Hitler is dead, Mussolini is dead, and Roosevelt is dead. The war is over, and you are free."

Along the road there was a large food warehouse that the Americans opened up so the former concentration camp inmates would have food to eat. George and his friends found some pasta, sugar, and vinegar and proceeded to prepare a feast. However, at the feast, they suffered from diarrhea.

After that, George found out that the Americans were gathering the former inmates at the Alpenjaeger Kaserne, a former German army barracks in Wels, so they could be de-loused and prepared to be transported home. However, the assembly center was initially

unorganized and at first chaos ensued. Some of the former inmates began to organize the kitchen and created out of total chaos a functioning organization. Those who were sick or dead were gathered in the yard for transportation to hospitals or the cemetery, respectively.

George's health rapidly deteriorated after liberation. He developed a severe case of diarrhea, a result of the retuning typhoid fever. Once he could no longer walk, he decided to go to the hospital. He was 21 years old and approximately 78 lbs. After he recovered, George truly became free, and homeless. Initially, he slept on the floor of a school, but then he decided to go back to the Displaced Persons' camp, which was now run by the United Nations. George became the manager of the store at the camp until it moved to a larger location. When the DP Camp was moved to Linz, using his language skills, George became the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) camp director's interpreter and assistant. He was a volunteer; the payment for the job he did was only food and shelter.

In the spring of 1946, George applied to enter the United States of America. He found out his mother survived the war in Hungary. She sent George his aunt's address in New York. As immigration to the United States started George just completed a year of volunteer work for the American Army and the United Nations. He was told that as recognition of his work, he was granted a permanent resident visa to enter the United States. He arrived in New York City during the summer of 1946 aboard the *Marine Flasher,* a small Liberty ship. George eventually met his wife, Iby, at the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) 92nd Street in New York City.

Today George Heller is no longer the homeless person who came to America with his shirt on his back and two dollars in his pocket. He lives in a nice home with his wife. They have been married 52 years. They have four married children and nine grandchildren.

George was able to rebuild his life in America. After a difficult period of getting started as a busboy on the lower east side of New York City, eventually he succeeded in continuing his education. He earned three American degrees, (two from MIT) and made significant contributions in the fields of computer science and computer science education.

George also rebuilt his Jewish life. While living in Poughkeepsie, New York, he served on the Board of the Community Hebrew School, on the Synagogue board, and for several years was the vice-president of the local Jewish Community Federation. His wife Iby was elected the first woman president of Temple Beth El, a large Conservative Congregation.

I am very thankful to have had the privilege of interviewing George Heller. George is a wonderful man with a very interesting story. He has a wonderful motto, which can be applied to everything. George says, "We have little control of events around us, but we can control the way we react."

Iby Heller

by Shira Yomtoubian

The Holocaust transformed Iby Heller into a Jewish observer. Being born Jewish doesn't necessarily make you observant and appreciate G-d, yet the experiences in your life do. Having Judaism as your identity might mean what religion your ancestors were, but having Judaism as your life means being observant and practicing on a regular basis. The Holocaust erased and created Judaism for different Jews, in different situations.

Iby Heller never practiced Judaism regularly in her childhood. She followed her parents on Pesach Seders, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. She never belonged to a synagogue or spoke Hebrew. In her hometown of Brussels, Belgium, she professed to be herself more "Hungarian-observant" rather then "Jew-observant." Later in Iby's childhood she learned the importance of Judaism and brought it to her life, because of the Holocaust.

Iby Heller started her journey in Brussels, Belgium in 1930. Her two parents were rooted in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Her father wanted an education, and because of a new anti-Jewish law in Hungary, he emigrated to study in Belgium. There he and his wife bore a beautiful child named Iby. She was an only child, and in 1939 her parents were kind enough to offer their hospitality to Ruth, a young Jewish child rescued from Czechoslovakia. Iby lived a normal Belgian life, going to school, hanging out with gentile and Jewish friends. In Belgium there were orthodox Jews walking around, but Iby would just question, "Why are they drawing attention to themselves?" Iby didn't understand the religious people in her neighborhood. She would just separate herself from them.

In 1939, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, where Iby's grandparents lived. Her father begged them to escape to Belgium, but their possessions kept them. Then Iby promised herself, "I will never become a slave of my possessions…things are not important." Soon enough Hitler was banging on the doors of Belgium, in 1940. Iby and her family then decided to get out of Belgium with supplies of blankets and the money in their hands. They drove to Paris, France and slept with other refugees and soldiers. Iby went to a French school for three weeks, learned history from a different viewpoint than what she learned in Belgium. Then Germany invaded France, so her family drove south through thick artificial fog, made by the French to protect the evacuees from being machine gunned by the German planes. They drove slowly because others were walking, yet soon enough people were turning north, escaping from the attack of Mussolini in Italy.

Iby's father joined the Allied Free Forces of England and enlisted in the Czechoslovakian army. Her mother, Ruth, and she got on a cargo ship and headed for Gibraltar to their new home in England. They slept on coal. Although it was dirty, she was young (ten years old) and enjoyed it. The ship went to Liverpool. The refugee dependents then were taken by bus

to London. Each refugee family was housed with an English family that would take care of them. Iby went to a new school with new rules. History again changed. The same battles had different outcomes. It taught Iby another important lesson, "the facts may not change; what changes is the way you look at things." After living in England for three months the London Blitz--bombs sent by Germans to invade England--sadly happened. Many slept in underground subway stations to protect themselves. Now because of those haunting bombs, Iby doesn't "like balloons. [She] has a great reaction to noises." Her father's unit in the army moved to Leamington Spa and his family followed him. There his fellow Jewish soldiers were having a Seder. Iby was the youngest, so she was requested to ask the four questions, but unfortunately she didn't know them. She felt ashamed and embarrassed. After her Pesach, she lived in England for 4 years, enjoying freedom and the goodness of English people.

In 1945, the war in Europe ended, and Iby and her family returned to Belgium. Many of her relatives had been deported and murdered. Few of the Gentile community in Belgium had helped save Jews. Although she was glad to be back in Belgium, living in Europe wasn't the same anymore. Her family decided to try a new environment in Paraguay. It was easier to get a VISA to Paraguay than it was to the USA. After four years she decided to leave her family and make her own adventure--a different life in the USA. She got more involved with Judaism in the USA and raised a Jewish family.

The effects from the Holocaust changed Iby Heller's life. She became more connected to her Jewish roots and religion. She grew and realized the importance of Judaism in her life and now in her children's. She married George Heller, a Holocaust survivor, and they had four children, so she "decided [she] should learn something about Judaism. [She] took Hebrew classes so that [she] would know when to turn the page in the prayer book." On her journey of discovering her Jewish heritage she became seriously involved with Jewish studies and the Jewish community and eventually was elected the first woman president of a large Conservative synagogue.

She's proud of being Jewish. She is thankful for surviving the Holocaust to be able to learn and practice her culture and religion of Judaism. She teaches us that traveling and experiencing the world doesn't destroy your life, but starts a fresh future. Also, that the Holocaust wasn't only a murderous event, but also a time that brought some Jews closer to Judaism.

Iby Heller welcomed me kindly into her simple house. She didn't have any classy or expensive possessions. We sat on the couch eagerly to start the interview. Her narrating seemed straightforward with no doubt except calling herself a true survivor. She had explained a rather lucky life, for a Holocaust survivor. She never experienced the ugliness and cruelty inside the camps or ghettos. I loved hearing her stories, especially how happy and full of traveling it was. We connected quickly, and she was able to tell fun and cute stories to me about her life after the Holocaust. After the interview she told me about her religious children and her new hobby of knitting (she gave me a cute, pink scarf). Iby amazed me with her kindness and Jewish transformation.

Seymour Hoff

by Amanda Cagan

Seymour Hoff, originally Shamshin Hoff, was born in April 1941 in Bilgorai, Poland. His mother, Ruth (Ruchale) was a nurse who later became a photographer's helper. That job led to her meeting with Seymour's father, Isaac, who was a photographer. Seymour's grandfather was a kosher butcher, an occupation that earned a comfortable income for the family. Because he was born at the prime of Nazi occupation, Seymour was a resident of his hometown for just five days. The Nazi invasion forced Seymour's family to flee from Poland and hide for the remainder of the war (about four years) in Uzbekistan. Meanwhile he lost his father during the war. After the war, in 1945, with his mother, two uncles, and his grandparents, Seymour was placed in a displaced persons (DP) camp in Ulm, Germany.

From 1945 to 1949, Seymour and the five other members of his family were residents of a tightly packed one-room apartment, which was no bigger than a modern-day kitchen. His first clear memories of his childhood are of the DP camp. He would go to school everyday where, among other subjects, he was taught Jewish studies. Seymour recalls that wherever he was, there was always an education provided and there was always a community of Jews who would get together and pray. Whether they were in the middle of a forest or in a beautiful sanctuary, Jews would set up an area for prayer and learning. This helped Seymour, and all of the other children, have an exposure to the traditions and culture of his Jewish heritage.

When he was not studying, Seymour would carry out the life of any normal child. I asked him where he played and what kind of surroundings he was brought up in. Seymour recalls that his playground was simply the war-torn landscape of Ulm. He reflects that he "was just a little boy playing" and that the dusty, barren, dead stretch landscape was all he knew and what he thought was "the way life is supposed to be."

In 1949, Seymour and his family received approval to enter the United States of America. Leaving behind his uncle, who went to fight the War of Independence in Israel, Seymour, his grandparents, one uncle, and his mother began their voyage to America. He recalls how much fun the boat ride was because he was the only passenger on board who did not get seasick. His fun on the boat led to his present day hobby of fishing. Upon arriving in the New York harbor, Seymour vividly remembers how it felt to enter the United States, greeted by the Statue of Liberty, the international symbol of liberty and freedom.

Throughout his story, I was amazed how little correspondence Seymour had with non-Jews. From birth to now, Seymour was brought up very religiously; from the Jewish education in the DP camps, to Yeshiva elementary and high schools in Brooklyn. Because of

the little contact he had with anti-Semitism and his isolation within the Jewish community, Seymour has only recently identified himself as a survivor. Originally, he felt guilty for being labeled a "survivor" because he did not feel like he survived; he felt that the term "survivor," and the honor that goes with it, belongs to those with the numbers on their arms and who had to endure the horrors of the camps.

However we decide to define the term, I believe that all angles of the story are very important toward our remembrance of this horrific time in our history. One thing that Seymour said really affected me. His experiences and the experiences of others were endured because "they don't know that there is a better life; you just lived the life that you were given." This really made me think about my life compared to those who lived through or are living through much more difficult situations.

There is so much to be learned from the Holocaust survivors and I feel so privileged to be part of this program. By recording the accounts of these amazing people, the world will, hopefully, never forget what happened to the Jewish people during Hitler's reign, so that similar events will be prevented in the future. We must learn from our past, and as the survivors dwindle in numbers, it becomes increasingly important to record their stories so that future generations will be able to learn from their experiences.

Cecilie Iczkovitz

by Eliana Green and Natalie Roth

Cecilie Iczkovitz is a wonderful woman. When we first opened her door, she and her son, Joe, warmly welcomed us into her home. It was a great coincidence that the day of our interview was on her 88th birthday, which made the interview even more special. We decided to surprise her with a chocolate birthday cake and sing her happy birthday, which turned out to be a great success. Mrs. Iczkovitz then kindly sat us down and began to tell her story.

Cecilie was born in 1917 in the city of Michalovce, Slovakia, which is now the country of Czechoslovakia. Michalovce was a small city consisting of 16,000 people. Her father owned a grocery store and her sister was a bookkeeper. She lived in a nice Jewish home and neighborhood. Her family was very observant. Most Jews in her community were orthodox. Her mother wore a sheitel (a wig) and she could not wear sleeveless clothes. Cecilie had only one or two non-Jewish friends and they all went to the same school.

Cecilie's father had moved to the United States to Omaha, Nebraska in the early 1900's. He lived there for at least five years and became a U.S. citizen around 1910. Soon after, Cecilie's mom in Slovakia wanted her son to return home. He came back and got married and had five children. Since their father was an American citizen, all were born American citizens in Slovakia, one of those children being Cecilie.

Life became very difficult for the Jews in Michalovce. First, the Nazis took men to the concentration camps, and then they took the women. Most Jewish families had a maid, and because Cecilie always wore skirts like the maids, she didn't appear Jewish.

In March 1944, on the second day of Passover, Cecilie escaped in the middle of the night to Budapest, Hungary. She never saw her parents, her brother or sister again.

In Budapest, she joined her sister and her niece. They were arrested by the Hungarian police and all of their valuables were taken from them, including American currency that Cecilie had sewn into the hem of her clothes. They were taken to a "safe house," which was a building where American nationals were detained and vouched for by the Swiss government. She recalls that once, while living in the safe house during a bombing raid, she luckily crossed the street to hide in another building. The first building was bombed and the people inside were killed. Cecilie survived because she had moved across the street.

In Budapest, the only way she could get food was from one of her friends, who would steal the food for her so that they would survive. Cecilie was constantly running away and

hiding from the Nazis, but she was not very confident that they wouldn't catch her. She was once caught and put in a line with other Jews being deported to a concentration camp. She fought to be freed because she was American and showed her American passport. One of the Nazis then took her out of the line and she luckily escaped.

Although she questioned where G-d was during the Holocaust, Cecilie stayed faithful to her Judaism throughout WWII. "He was supposed to love us" but the Nazis constantly said that G-d didn't love the Jews and that's why this was happening.

She later heard that her little sister and brother, along with her parents, were taken to Auschwitz and murdered. She was 24 when this happened. Thankfully one brother and one sister survived.

Her future husband had also been captured and was taken to Auschwitz, but luckily he was young so he was sent to a labor camp, building railroads for the Nazis. He had been married before he met Cecilie. His first wife had been pregnant. She, as well as their newborn baby, was killed in Auschwitz.

The Russians came and liberated the Jews from Hungary. Cecilie then went to Czechoslovakia, and from there went further east to Russia. After WWII she married her husband, and they lived in Beregszaz.

Cecilie and her husband then came to the U.S. in 1948. They had a favored status because she had an American passport. She and her husband then moved to Omaha, where her father's grocery store had been, and came to find that it was still there. In 1950, with newborn son Joe, they moved to Detroit. Cecilie and her husband and a second son Les continued their life in America. In 2005, she moved to San Jose, California to be closer to her son.

In 1995, Cecilie returned to Eastern Europe for a visit. Michalovce, the town where she was born, had changed. Her home was gone; it was a new town. She and her family then went to Muncacz, which had had a big Jewish population, and was near where her husband was born. There were no Jews. In the village where he had been born, there was still a Jewish cemetery. It was dilapidated, but amazingly enough, she found the gravestone for her husband's parents and all of his seven siblings.

Cecilie is so thankful for her wonderful children and life today. She taught us so much about bravery and survival. Cecilie and her son are two amazing people and we will never forget their story. We will continue to tell this story "from generation to generation" and make sure it will never be forgotten. Thank you Mrs. Iczkovitz for telling us your amazing story.

Cecilie Iczkovitz - "Try how you can. Everybody's different. I am proud of myself. Where I am, I am, I won't cry about it. I never complained; it doesn't help anyway."

Moshe Iofis

by Jake Alexander

As a participant of the class "From Generation to Generation," I had the utmost privilege to meet Mr. Moshe Iofis, a Holocaust survivor and Russian WWII veteran. Moshe was born on August 7, 1926, in a little town called Disna, Poland, which was located on the Polish-Russian border. The town was mostly Jewish, and everyone lived rather peacefully. They spoke Yiddish and practiced Judaism in a strict orthodox fashion. Moshe attended a "cheder" religious school, and the rabbi taught him and his classmates the chanting of the prayers. Anti-Semitism was quite common in Poland, and Moshe recalled the Polish students passing by his home along the Kopernik Street and yelling: "Jews, go to Palestine!"

Moshe's prewar way of life changed on September 17, 1939, when Soviet troops marched into the Eastern part of Poland and entered Moshe's hometown, Disna. It had become possible after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, to divide Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. Thus, Eastern Belorussia became connected to the U.S.S.R. As a result of this change, residents of former Poland became Soviet citizens. Moshe was required to learn Russian, Belarussian, and move down from 7th grade in Polish school to 5th grade in Soviet school. The tradition of his orthodox ancestors was completely cut off due to the restrictions on religion imposed by the Soviet government. Some of the immediate hardships Moshe faced as a Soviet citizen included long lines at the markets and shops, which were a standard part of living under Stalin's rule. Nonetheless, life went on, until one fateful day that would change his life forever.

On a sunny Sunday, June 22, 1941, Moshe's mother gave him some money to go to the town and buy ice cream. As he crossed the road coming back with his treat, Moshe heard the word that would change his world forever, "milchome!"(in Yiddish, "war!"). The Germans, in the infamous Operation Barbarossa, had violated the pact they had made with the Soviets two years earlier and invaded Soviet territory. A few days later, after much arguing and panic within the family, they finally decided to flee the home that Moshe's grandfather, Berl Abramson, had built with his own hands. Although this was hard for them, they thus avoided the imminent occupation and extermination of the Jews in their town and surrounding area. The road ahead of them, however, would be filled with much hardship and difficulty.

Their arduous journey began with a 40-kilometer trek to the city of Polotsk, where they boarded a train to Vitebsk, the hometown of the famous artist Marc Chagall. There were many refugees trying to get out of Poland to avoid the Nazis, and thus, the trains were very crowded and the conditions were extremely uncomfortable. On the way, attacking German forces bombarded their transport, but fortunately, Moshe and his family arrived

at their destination. From their next stop, Vyazma, they had to travel in an open-air train. Despite the difficult conditions Moshe and his family faced, the Russian people were very compassionate toward them, and during the stops they brought the refugees milk, eggs, and bread. Finally, his family arrived at their first place of residence, Chkalovsk, which sat at the bank of the Volga River. Here, Moshe worked laboriously to provide food and housing for the family. In late fall, the family moved out of Chkalovsk on a self-propelled barge called a "Bashkiriya." His family spent two terrible weeks on the boat, suffering from cold and hunger. People around him suffered from such diseases as dysentery and typhoid, and the dead were thrown into the river. Finally, after a long and miserable boat ride, they arrived in the city of Saratov.

One of Moshe's most vivid memories of Saratov was when he stood in line for bread throughout the whole night. When the store finally opened the next day, soldiers stormed into the store and took all the bread, and Moshe returned empty-handed. Despite the fact that he did not bring any food, his mother was relieved because she had thought he was missing. After stopping in Saratov for only a short while, Moshe's family traveled through the harsh, cold region of Siberia, through the cities of Alma-Ata to North Kazakhstan. Finally, they arrived in a small village named Mnogotsveytnoye where they lived in a kitchen of a small house. Moshe remembers the owner, Levchenko, constantly yelling at them "Jews, why did you come here?" At this house, Moshe was again forced to do hard labor, delivering grain from the combine in the snowy steppe in sledges carried by bulls. While Moshe lived in this village, he was ordered to go to an industrial school in Petropavlosk, Northern Kazakhstan. Here, he was trained to be a worker at electrical railway communication stations. One of the tasks they undertook was to dig pits in the icy Siberian ground for telegraph columns, which Moshe remembers as being nearly impossible. While working in the bitter cold, Moshe experienced "chicken blindness" for a period of time due to the lack of vitamins in the food he was eating.

The fateful day came in November of 1943 when he was recruited into the Red Army at the age of 17. His family stayed in North Kazakhstan. First, Moshe went to the 20th Sniper School in Turkmenia, from which he graduated in August of 1944. He then became a soldier of the 350th Regiment of the 22nd Landing Force Brigade stationed at Teikovo, Russia. Later, they were then transformed into the 114th Infantry Division. On March 5, 1945, his Division started the battles in Hungary. On their way to battle, they marched through the city of Budapest, Hungary, which lay in complete ruins. The first fights they experienced were at Lake Balaton and at the city of Sekeshfehervar. In the very first battle of Moshe's 5th Company, 18 of his fellow men were killed, and the commander was shot dead, instantly. However, Moshe and his comrades succeeded in pushing the Germans back farther into retreat, and his men progressed toward the Hungarian-Austrian border. They crossed the Raba River, and although they initially met resistance in Austria, he and two other snipers saw the Germans wave a white flag in surrender, and the Nazi soldiers were immediately apprehended.

As his regiment marched in toward Vienna, Austria's capital, they were met by friendly

Austrians on their way to confronting the German army. On April 8th, when Moshe and his regiment entered fighting in Vienna, he was hit in the hip by a bullet as he was running from a railroad embankment down to the street. Luckily, Moshe found shelter in a trench right next to the place where he had been hit, and a medical attendant, Naumov, found him and bandaged him up. That night, he was placed under a railroad bridge where several other soldiers lay injured. In the morning, another medical attendant, Tarasenko, carried him to a cart pulled by horses and he was taken to a Medical Sanitary Battalion to have the bullet removed. Since there was no previous X-ray examination, the surgery was agonizing as the surgeon dug deep into his flesh to find the bullet. He was unsuccessful. Two weeks later, the bullet appeared on the opposite side of where Moshe was hit, and was removed by a small incision. His treatment continued at a hospital in Bad-Veslau, Austria, where he was restored to good health.

On May 9th, Moshe and the other Russian soldiers celebrated Victory Day, and dreamed of everlasting hope and peace in the future. For Moshe's achievements, he was awarded the "Order of the Patriotic War," the "Medal for the Capture of Vienna" and the "Medal for Courage." In August 1945, Moshe returned to the 350th Guard Regiment, and since he was one of the youngest serving in the military, he was required to serve another five years until August 1950. In 1948, during his tenure in the Red Army, Moshe took leave to go visit his hometown, Disna. All he found was rubble and dust; his home was completely devastated by the war. So was the entire town ruined. The Jewish population of almost 4200 people had almost disappeared completely. Almost half of them had perished in the ghetto.

In August 1945, after a seven-year-long service in the Red Army, Moshe was released from the service. He moved to his father's native hometown, Riga, Latvia. There Moshe studied medicine, earned a degree in medical sciences, and worked as a neurologist and psychiatrist for 38 years. In 1995, Moshe finally decided to immigrate to the United States, where his sons had already been living. His youngest grandchildren, Amber-Michelle and Gilana were both born in America.

Moshe's main concern is that a new tragedy, like WWII and the Holocaust of the Jewish people, must never happen again. He thinks that any modern aggression must be prevented in a timely fashion, though he does not expect to reduce the threats by means of appeasing the new Hitlers that are so evidently rising up.

In May 2005, Moshe Iofis published a collection of memoirs written by WWII Russian veterans called "When We Were Young." It is the first such memoir published in English, written first-hand by mostly Jewish WWII veterans who now live in California. Their stories well reflect the essential contribution by the Jews of the Soviet Union to defeat Nazi Germany in WWII. Those who are interested in the book may email Moshe at *miofis@sbcglobal.net.*

Boris Kapilevitch

by Jason Mighdoll

A Tragic Tale with a Bright Future!

On a nice brisk sunny day, young Boris Kapilevitch took a step out of his cozy, secure home in Minsk, Russia, only to find the world he knew in ruins. Boris was about five and a half years old when the door swung open and his mother, Elizabeth, came rushing in with a look of complete horror on her face. Her simple words are still sharp in Boris' mind, "We have to go, this is war." Boris' life would never be the same!

Pre-war Minsk was a lovely, quaint, orchard town that seemed almost untouched by time. Boris's father, Mordechai (Max in Russian), was the manager at the local cinema, while his mom had the full time job of holding down the fort at home with the two kids, Boris and his brother Leonide, who were five and nine respectively. The Kapilevitch family was not very religiously observant, and in fact rarely practiced their faith at all because of the strict anti-religion laws of the Communist party and Russian government.

Before the war the Kapilevitch family was as normal and truly honest as the Russian Orthodox or non-religious families across town. Summer camp, tricycles, and all kinds of childhood games filled the town. They never suspected it would soon all come crumbling down.

June 22, 1941 was the fateful day that Minsk's population of 280,000 began to wither down to less than 196,000, a decline of nearly 30 %. With the war approaching, Boris's father was drafted into the Soviet Army, while Boris, his brother, and his mother remained in Minsk.

Life continued regularly in Minsk for the time being, with a few bombing raids, during which the town fled to the fields, seeking safe haven from the rubble. Then Boris and his brother observed the first wave of German infantry marching through the city. The previously serene atmosphere transformed into one of fear and panic. "Nobody knew what to do," recounted Boris.

Boris' house was in a predominantly Jewish part of town. Approximately 20 families resided there in flats or row houses. Boris' street was typical, with sheds, toilets, and even a water pump. When the Germans invaded they turned that peaceful neighborhood into a ghetto, surrounded by barbed wire and fencing. Jews were brought from all over the city and forced to enter the death trap the Germans called a ghetto. Nobody knew what was going to happen. They did observe, however, that the fences and towers being built for German soldiers to guard weren't facing out, but in. Fear spread like an uncontrollable disease.

The nonchalant non-Jewish population on the outside world casually walked around and glanced in as if nothing was wrong. Many outsiders, some whom the Kapilevitch family had known for years, others they had recently befriended and many they did not know, cooperated with the German or Russian Nazi forces stationed there. The Jew haters and anti-Semites were the first to join up. They were similar to the local police force except they wore a Nazi symbol and eagerly waited for a Jew to step out of line so that s/he could play God and sentence an innocent human being to death based on his/her faith and background.

The Jews who had been herded into this increasingly dirty ghetto had been without food and were slowly starving to death. There was not a bite of edible food to be had within the tall walls of the German death trap. The only way to get food was to exchange coats or any small valuable for some measly potatoes or stale bread. Boris's mother exchanged her dresses and cloth just to feed her sons.

The all-superior Aryan race of Germans threw open the door of each and every house, ravaging and pillaging it without a second thought. Taking away all prized possessions that a family may have worked hard for all their lives was no problem for them, as they didn't see it as stealing; rather they believed they were entitled to take the property. The barbaric pillaging of the ghetto ended once everything was snatched, except for a few simple beds and tables. Boris's house was empty and echoed where valuable furniture had once stood.

Winter came and with it the below freezing temperatures that turned the water pump to ice. Boom! The reverb of a single gunshot filled every corner of the Minsk ghetto. Boris rushed to the window only to see that what he heard was not a figment of his imagination. Directly opposite his house, a local boy, who had become a Nazi policeman, had murdered a woman who had gone to get water from the pump. This incident was Boris's first sight of death and the disgusting level to which humanity can sink.

Soon after that first incident of death, orders came for Boris's mother to work in one of the labor columns. She left for work early everyday and came home very late, Boris recalls.

Each day was similar to the one before until the day a German truck drove by and stopped at his house. Boris felt a rush of insecurity as his older brother sent him to hide while he and an elderly woman who had been living with them, faced the German Nazis. Boris found shelter under a bed in the house, but not before he watched in horror as his brother and elderly friend were assassinated right before his eyes. The Nazis walked Leonide and the elderly woman outside into a large, all-metal car that had no windows of any kind. This killing machine had an exhaust pipe that circulated into the car and killed the inhabitants by the time they reached the destination, their final resting-place.

That first pogrom of the Minsk ghetto ended as spring of 1942 began. Boris hid under the

bed for three long, scary days until his mother came home from the work camp. The Nazis had not allowed the workers back into the ghetto during the pogrom. As Boris explained to his mother what had happened, she became increasingly scared. She was so frightened that she decided to risk taking Boris in the column to work each day, even though children were not permitted. Children that had tried to accompany their mothers previously had been caught and murdered despite the effort of the entire column to hide them. There was no mercy: if a child was found he or she was shot right on the spot.

This became an everyday routine; the other mothers would make their rows around Boris to hide him in the middle. Boris remembers very well the route of the column, and every day it was another day of fear. Fear for life.

This went on for weeks since the first pogrom until Boris' mother finally felt safe enough to once again leave Boris at home. Not long after, the second pogrom swept through the city leaving few souls alive. Boris could hear the crying noise and panic of his neighbors through the walls.

Boris's survival instincts kicked in as his young fearful life was in danger once more. He wanted to hide in the attic, which coincidentally was connected to many neighboring houses, but there was no ladder. Luckily the wall had gaps in it large enough for him to step on to climb up. Just as he reached the attic, someone pushed him down because he was so young and thus could possibly put everyone's lives in jeopardy by being too loud. When Boris assured them that he would remain silent, he finally made it into the attic where four other families were hiding as well. Everyone was sitting, waiting to find out what would happen.

The slits in the wood of the attic walls allowed Boris to see the surrounding street. Everyone's hearts in the attic were pounding making the only noise in their tight niche. Boris saw the same gas car, in Russian called a "Dooshegoobka," pass by many of the neighbors' houses and pass judgement on life, just as if the Nazis themselves were the grim reaper. He saw a column of women murdered and Germans forcing Jews into the gas car. The air was filled with the screams of women and children crying. The soldiers started to push them toward the open doors of the truck. "That feeling of horror that I have experienced is difficult to describe," said Boris.

After the second pogrom Boris's mother took him with her to the column again. Despite the column being 10 people thick and the other people trying to squeeze in, he was spotted like a desperate needle in a haystack along Respublicanskaya Street. As soon as the German saw him, he brought Boris to the German officer in front. Boris' mother pleaded to the front superior officer to let Boris go and made every effort to keep him alive. After much crying and begging, the superior officer ordered Boris to go free but gave Boris' mother a stern warning that if any other officer were to catch him they both would be shot on the spot. Much relief swept over Boris and his mother, as they had just narrowly escaped death, although not for the last time.

Boris's mother was the assistant to a non-Jewish glazier, a 50-60 year old man. They were working on a large six-story building that, before the war, was to be communist headquarters. The glazier gave Boris half of his small bread for breakfast and took him outside the column on his way home, replacing Boris's jacket with one that did not have a yellow star. The glazier took the young, frightened Boris back to the ghetto a different way, to a side of the ghetto that had a hole at the bottom large enough for Boris to crawl through. Then the glazier told Boris to, "run away." The next day the man was at the wire and brought Boris to the work site, but not with the column. The glazier had heard from the Germans that some big action was happening in the ghetto again. He took Boris to his home and Boris stayed there all day before returning to the ghetto, which turned out to save his life.

After the war, Boris walked the same streets he remembers walking with the glazier. Left here, right here, the memories are burned into the back of his mind. Boris remembers that everyday a little girl would run and give him a piece of food. He later learned that other children beat her up because she gave food to a Jew. After the war in Minsk, Boris went to the house of that young girl's family to finally meet her. "It was a dry meeting," Boris recalls. "She was one year older than me. When I was 14, I met her for the first time since the war. She was a beautiful girl." She didn't recognize him so many years later, and after the initial meeting they didn't talk much. "It took a special kind of kindness and bravery to do what that young girl did," said Boris.

A German citizen, a normal functional guy, led his mother's column. He never said a word about Boris being in the column because after all, he was just one kid. One day the German column leader told Boris's mother that Boris couldn't go with the column that day. They first thought that they had finally been caught and were going to be slaughtered like sheep, just as their family and friends had been. Instead, the German brought them to a rundown area filled with broken glass. He told them not to leave until he came back. Later that day he returned and led them back to the ghetto.

Boris' mother looked around to find out why they had been separated, but she couldn't find anyone from the column. It had been exterminated! It was as if it had never existed. All 300 people had been killed. The only thing that spared her life was her child. The German took mercy on them and saved their two lives out of the entire column.

Why did the Nazis decide to murder all 300 people on that particular day? Next to the six-story building where the column had been working was a two-story house that belonged to Kolber, one of Hitler's governors. Kolber had ordered a prostitute and in return received a bomb that blew him to pieces. Consequently, the Nazis killed everyone who was working there! The only survivors were Boris and his mother.

Boris' mother went to the magistrate and was reassigned to work at the rail station with one of her friends. After months of hard labor, a German guard told her that a group

of SS soldiers was coming and advised her to leave as soon as possible, showing her which direction provided the safest escape route. The entire ghetto was going to be liquidated. It was no longer safe for Boris and his mother there. She and Boris made a break for freedom. Surprisingly and against all odds they escaped from the ghetto. They were not safe though as many traitorous people in the city were just waiting to catch a Jew.

That summer Boris and his mother started wandering from city to city, homeless and desperate. Leaving Minsk behind and hiding from the soldiers and policeman, they walked for many days. They had been warned which cities to avoid and which were safe. They made their way, surviving by begging for food on the streets. They were homeless and helpless with no food or light at the end of the tunnel.

After many rejections, some farmers let them spend the night and even gave them some food. The next morning the farmers pointed them toward a partisan zone. After trying at countless camps, they finally found one that would take them despite their Judaic background.

Boris and his mother were accepted and became part of a family group, where Commander Frol Ivabovich Zaitev was in charge. They stayed with this group, which had been named after Chkalov in 1943, until the liberation of Minsk in the summer of 1944. The partisans made their lives among the brush of the forest. To survive they dug holes in the ground big enough for people to sleep. Life as Boris remembers it was miserable, often with nothing to eat for days on end but roots. Yet, anything was nicer than the German death camps.

Toward the end of 1945 Boris' father returned from the war and the family was reunited. Boris' sister Dora was born in 1947. Boris went to a university for many years and gained a great deal of knowledge and education. He learned the important skills to become a successful engineer.

After battling enormous bureaucracy for many years, Boris was able to leave the USSR in 1973 for the promised land of Israel. He lived there for a few years and then moved to South Africa, before moving to the United States of America, the home of the free. Boris is 61 years young now and after a few years in Boston, Massachusetts is now a resident of Los Gatos, California. He has focused his skills and has become a real estate broker looking to make his mark in his knew home.

"My parents always taught me that it doesn't matter what you are in life, as long as you are always honest and kind. They inspired me and encouraged me to get an education because, as they always said, 'If you want to achieve something in life you have to have an education.'" Both Boris's parents have now passed away, but not without leaving their mark on the world and their children.

Very few people survived the Holocaust, and even fewer are still alive to tell their

story. “As a survivor-prisoner of the Minsk Ghetto, I regard myself among those few from my generation who are life witnesses of the Holocaust – the tragedy of Jews during the Second World War.”

Boris Kapilevitch, of the Minsk Ghetto, survived to tell his true account of the genocide of Jews across Europe to future generations. We must learn from the past and say together, “NEVER AGAIN!”

Paul Kent

by Victoria Harrison

Born in 1920, Paul Kent (born Kauftheil) spent a happy childhood as a member of a large Orthodox family in Vienna. At the time, Vienna was home to 200,000 Jews (10% of the population), and Jews were powerful in the professions, commerce, the theater, etc. His father worked in wholesale linens; his mother raised seven children--Annie, Antoinette, Frances, Max, Stella, Paul, and Edith. In the early 1930s, Paul's father's business suffered in the worldwide economic depression, and he went bankrupt in 1934. The result for Paul was that the family did not have the money for him to go to college. So, rather than going to the college preparatory school—gymnasium—Paul went to a tradesman's high school and began an apprenticeship as a tailor. An active, soccer-playing boy, he protested such a sedentary job. But many times in his life, when he was able to practice his trade, he thanked his mother for insisting on this apprenticeship.

One Friday night in that same year, 1934, following shabbat dinner when it was time for open discussion about politics and the world, Max—10 years Paul's senior--shocked the socialist family by announcing that he had quit his job and would be leaving the following Tuesday for Palestine. His family was very upset and thought he was crazy, but he sensed already that things were not right in Austria, and because he was an active Zionist he wanted to help to form a Jewish homeland. During the next few years, Zionism became very strong in Vienna, and Paul became active in the Maccabi movement. Every year there was a huge rally and march to the gravesite of Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement. When the (Austrian) Nazis began to gain power in Austria, they fought in the streets nightly with the Zionists.

When in February 1938 Hitler marched into Vienna and annexed Austria to the Reich, non-Jewish friends and neighbors began to shun them; Nazis grabbed Jewish youth off the street and took them away; Paul's boss, who was Jewish, lost his business to a Nazi who walked in one day and demanded the keys to the store and everything in it. The Kauftheil family quickly tried to find means to emigrate, but by then most of the world had closed its doors. The Kauftheils had family in London and San Francisco, and thanks to their help, three of his sisters were able to emigrate to the US in November 1939. One sister made it to Palestine with the Youth Aliyah. And in June 1938 Paul gained passage to England.

His family remaining in Vienna suffered tremendously, especially after Kristalnacht, and by then the English embassy in Vienna was closed. Only a group of American Quakers came to help the Jews in Vienna, setting up a soup kitchen and caring for those in need, as much as possible. Paul's mother wrote him that one of his closest, non-Jewish friends came to the door on Kristalnacht, in order to arrest him. On this and many other occasions in his

life, Paul recognized his luck. “Why am I here?” he asks in his warm living room in Palo Alto. “Somewhere along the line, I’m lucky.” His eldest sister and her baby, his parents, and most of his other relatives perished in the Holocaust.

On the train from Austria to England, Paul was stripped and searched by a Nazi guard, who tore up and threw out his tefillin and cut open the new suit he had made for his journey. When he crossed the border into Belgium, he sighed with relief, and the rest of his voyage went smoothly. He discovered in London that while other Jewish refugees who were professionals had no work, he had plenty as a tailor.

But his ease of living did not last long. All the refugees in England had to be judged, because of fears of a 5th column, as to their loyalty to England, their temporary home. Paul was put into the category of “Jews under restriction,” and in May 1940 he was taken with 1000 others to the Isle of Man, a resort area with barbed wire all around it. As the quickly appointed personal tailor to the colonel in charge of the refugee camp, Paul earned special treatment. And when possible passage to Canada became available, the colonel told Paul about it.

The only problems were that the ship was not, as stated, a luxury liner—it was a troop transport filled with German and Italian seamen-prisoners singing Nazi songs—and it was en route not to Canada but to Australia, with stops in Sierra Leone and South Africa.

After spending two and a half years in a desert refugee camp 500 miles inland from Sidney, among the wild emus, kangaroos, and enormous sand storms, Paul finally got passage back to England in early 1942. There were two ships leaving Sidney together, both full of Jewish enlistees in the Austrian military headed for England. Though Paul had wanted to enlist as well, he was declared unfit because of a congenital heart murmur. He went on the transport nonetheless, and once again his life was saved: the ship he was to be on was torpedoed and all aboard died; at the last minute he had switched to the other ship, which arrived safely. But because he could not fight, he was promptly returned to the Isle of Man.

Once again, Paul’s uncle in London intervened, and he was released at the end of the year, 1942. Again he was able easily to get work, and he began a more normal life in London. He met his wife Elsie in 1943. She was a student of French and German, in London in order to try to enlist as a naval intelligence officer. Because her German was was not quite perfect, she accepted instead a job in the admiralty press office.

Paul and Elsie were married after the war, in 1945. They had a baby girl, Rosalind, and awaited passage to America. Finally in 1948 they got the call they had been anticipating from the American Embassy, and they were given their visas to travel to America. In San Francisco at the Social Security office they made a quick decision, upon glancing at a local phone book, to change their name to one that was recognizable to Americans, and from that day they began their American life as Paul and Elsie Kent. They settled first in San

Francisco and then in Palo Alto, moving into the first tract of Eichler homes, where they still live today, and becoming charter members of Temple Beth Am in Los Altos Hills. They had three more children, Roger, Beverly, and David. All of their children went to college, are married, and have given Paul and Elsie 11 grandchildren.

Paul resumed his career as a tailor, working first at Hastings in San Francisco and then in Palo Alto. In 1960 he became a partner of the men's custom tailor shop Krogh and Pohlman, co-owning and then owning two shops, where one could expect fine tailoring, personal service, and coffee and cake in the afternoon. When he finally closed his doors in 1989, local papers called it "the end of an era."

These days, Paul plays tennis and bridge; he and his wife travel extensively; he belongs to the local Bnai Brith. He still owns the little prayer book that has been handed down in his family for 500 years. An agnostic, Paul believes in God; he is a Zionist. "I was born a Jew; I will die a Jew." But sprightly at 85, Paul will be with us and his loving family, Gd willing, for many years to come.

It has been my great privilege to converse with Paul Kent, to learn his story, and to record it here. With every story that is told and recorded, history is preserved, and each individual who survived the Holocaust becomes a piece of the fabric of that survivor history. I have enjoyed my small part in continuing this process.

Thomas Klein

by Daniel Gavens

Thomas Klein was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1933 and was an only child. When Thomas was born his father, Gyula, or Julius, had already left the family business to start a new one selling dairy products and working at a dairy processing plant, which he later had to sell to the Nazis. Julius worked very hard to start up his new business to help support the family. During World War II Thomas's father served as a truck driver in the army, but fortunately did not have to go into battle.

Hungary at that time was a segregated society, similar to the American South before the Civil Rights Movement. For example, Jews were treated as second-class citizens and were not allowed to shop in certain stores, attend universities, take government positions and certain professions were restricted to them. Along with other Jewish men, Thomas's father was drafted into the Hungarian army during the middle of World War II. He was sent to an auxiliary troop with just Jews. In these Jews-only troops the commanders were told that when no one was left, they may return home. This led to very poor care of the Jews. His troop was sent to Russia with few provisions, and inadequate shelter. They were basically sent to die. Fortunately, before his troop left Hungary, Thomas's father came down with appendicitis. Because of his illness, he never actually went to Russia.

Although Hungary had allied with Germany in1941, Hitler invaded the country in March 1944. At this time the family moved into Jewish-only restricted areas that the Hungarians had arranged. The conditions were not ideal at all. They had one room per family instead of a whole apartment. Families were crowded into apartment buildings, multiple families per apartment, one family per room, all sharing a small kitchen and inadequate bathroom facilities. The Nazis gave them food stamps and enforced a strict curfew. Thomas had to wear the yellow Jewish star on his clothes. Then things got worse. They were moved again. Thomas was put in a Swedish household, which meant that he and his family got extra protection from the Swedish government. Even with this extra protection things were still bad. There were 91 people crammed into a 1- room apartment.

Around December of 1944 Gyula pulled some strings and was able to get his family to move into the truck repair shop where he was working. Thomas, his mother and two family friends managed to hide there, but it was really difficult. Thomas wasn't allowed to go to the bathroom and no one could talk. They had to sit in complete silence all day long. For food, since the army didn't even have food, they had to scrounge around just to survive.

As the war was winding down, the line of command dissolved and Thomas's father was free to go. The family pretended they were Russians and moved into an air raid shelter under the apartment in the auxiliary camp where they had previously been interned.

Because they were pretending to be Christian and hiding beneath the apartment building that housed Jews who could recognize them, they had to be very careful so the Russians wouldn't figure out their true identities.

After the shooting had died down above ground they were able to move back to their old apartment which they had lived in before the war. Times were very tough. Water and food were scarce. After a couple of weeks there was a rumor that the Germans were coming back. At that point Thomas and his family decided to leave. Thomas's father decided they should try to get to eastern Hungary, where he thought they might find more food. They walked between five and eight kilometers a day until they reached their destination. They ended up in the little village of Galospetri where his mother had grown up. They stayed there for a while but Thomas's father then decided that they should move on to another town in Romania, Ermihalyfelva. Here Thomas went to a university and his father died in 1952. Thomas then became the main provider and had to take care of his mother. He made money by handing out the winnings on soccer bets. They had to save up to stay warm during the winter and for food. When things began to look bad Thomas decided to go to Scotland to finish up with his studies. He also met his wife Susan and had his son. He still wasn't making enough money to live comfortably so Thomas and his family moved to the United States in 1966.

Charlie Marr

by Max Blumenthal

Charlie Marr, whose family name was originally Margulies, had a fairly easy life compared to most survivors of the Holocaust. He was born in Krakow, Poland in the year 1934 into a very wealthy family. It was a prominent family in the Jewish community of Krakow. Charlie has little recollection of Poland since he was five years old when his family left.

The Marrs earned their money in the garment industry. The three clothing stores in Krakow were all family owned. The largest, his grand-father's, was Leon Braciejowski Ltd. Charlie's father, Alfred Marr (Margulies), worked in his father-in-law's business, while his mother, Giselle Marr (Braciejowski), was the designer for the business. She introduced to Krakow the radical idea of ready-made women's clothing. Most clothing was custom-made. Before this idea, people would go to a tailor, get measured and return a few days later to pick up their new outfit.

Charlie's parents would go to Paris, twice a year, for the fashion shows . While his parents were away, Charlie and his siblings, Ann Lauterbach (currently 73 years old) and J. William (Bill) Marr (currently 75 years old), would usually stay at home with the nursemaids and an aunt would supervise the household.

In 1939, Charlie's father decided that Europe was becoming increasingly politically unstable, so instead of staying home with the servants Charlie and his siblings joined their parents for a month-long vacation in France. Since the situation in Poland was not improving, they extended their vacation for another month. Then they extended it for a third month. Finally, when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, there was no going back home.

In 1940, when the situation in France began to deteriorate because of Germany's invasion, Charlie's father moved the family to Spain, with the help of some bribes. From Spain, they booked passage, first class of course, on a ship to Haiti by way of Cuba. At first the Cuban officials were going to imprison them (their visas were not valid), but since the meeting of the Organiization of American States was being held in Cuba at that time, they relented ("the Americans will complain"), allowing the passengers to land in Cuba, as long as they promised to keep in touch with the government. According to Charlie, the Cuban government is still waiting for him to call!

After nine months waiting in Cuba, the family got immigration visas to the United States under the Polish quota. Before the Second World War you had to wait for years to get a visa, but since no one could come from Poland, it only took a nine-month wait. Expecting to have to stay a long time, Charlie's father bought a tie store in order to have something to do while waiting in Cuba.

The family went from Havana to Miami and then on to New York. However, everyone except Charlie's father spent about six months in Asheville, North Carolina while Charlie's sister recovered from pneumonia that she had contracted in Cuba. The family moved to New York because of the garment industry and worked in that industry until retirement. Almost all of the family money was either lost in Europe or spent rescuing members of the family. Charlie's parents remained in New York until after they retired and the New York winters became too much. They then moved to Los Angeles to be near Charlie's sister and her children. The family's life in the United States was, thanks to very hard work by Charlie's parents, comfortable.

When Charlie and his siblings came to the United States they did not speak English but immediately started public school. The only concession made for their immigrant status was that they were not graded for the first six months.

Charlie retired after practicing law for 45 years. He was brought to California by the General Electric Company in 1968 but after a few years went into private practice in Sunnyvale, California (Santa Clara County). He now lives in Los Altos, California.

While Charlie's family fled the Nazis by heading west, his future brother-in-law's family (the Lauterbach family), also from Krakow, headed east toward Russia. From there, the Lauterbach family was supposed to board a ship to America. However, when they got to Kiev their Polish passports were no longer recognized because Germany and Russia had just conquered Poland and Poland therefore no longer existed. They sent a message to a relative who was at the New York Worlds Fair of 1939 to get them papers. Money changed hands and they had passports from one of the "Banana Republics." Before sending the passports they were rebound with fancy book binding and gold leaf. In order to get out the family had to go to Moscow by train. At the train station a bureaucrat started to give them a hard time until she asked for passports. When she saw the fancy passports, which she probably couldn't read since she had them upside down, she asked if they were diplomats. His father said yes, he is the counsel-general. She was so afraid of repercussions from Moscow that she had the police form a line to pass all their luggage onto the train to get them out before they asked for names.

Although the Holocaust deeply affected his parents due to the loss of many relatives (Charlie's father's parents and others) they shielded the children and Charlie was unaware until he grew up.

Charlie's story has impacted me in a couple ways. First of all, it showed me exactly how corrupt a lot of political officials are. I did not realize that bribery was so easy, especially during times of war. His story also showed me that Holocaust survivors could experience difficulties without being placed in a concentration camp. It also showed me that luck was a major reason for most people surviving. If his family had not been able to bribe the officials, Charlie would probably not be alive today.

Lydia Mednick

by David Osofsky

This is the story of Holocaust survivor Lydia Mednick. Lydia was born in Rome, Italy on September 13, 1925. She grew up living in an apartment building, Palazzo Sabbadini, with her entire extended family on her mother's side. Each one of her four aunts lived on their own floor, as did her family. Her grandfather had given each of his daughters a floor of the building as a wedding gift. Lydia was raised "indistinguishable from any other Italian." The only time she felt different was when she had to stand in the hall by herself during religious instruction at her Catholic school. She had a lot of fun running up and down the stairs of the building with her 17cousins. While her family was fairly assimilated, they did regularly attend a small Orthodox synagogue in Rome. During the summers, her extended family vacationed together in the town of Nettuno, in the villa owned by her family.

In 1936 Lydia and her immediate family moved to Milan. Two years later, her little sister Sandi was born. It was at this time that the climate in Italy began to change with the enactment of racial laws. Young Lydia was thrown out of school. Her parents became very preoccupied with trying to make plans to flee. Suddenly Lydia was forced to grow up and assume responsibility for her little sister. The family had no more servants to do all their chores. These now became Lydia's responsibility. This was a big change for Lydia as her life had been carefree before this point. She needed to air out every bed everyday, and sweep everything (there were no vacuums). In Italy, every food course was served on its own plate. This made so many dirty dishes that Lydia began a campaign to "do as the American's do" with all the food served on one dish.

The United States was not granting visas to the Jews of Europe at this time. But her father found a clever way to get in to the U.S. In July of 1939 Mr. DeNola, Lydia's father, traveled to the World's Fair in New York on a businessman's visa. After the fair, he left the U.S. and traveled to Cuba. He had discovered that he could then reenter the United States on an immigrant visa and apply for citizenship papers. Once he was in possession of the immigrant visa he was eligible to apply for visas for the rest of his family. One year after he left Italy, Lydia, her mother and siblings arrived in New York on June 10, 1940. On that very day, Mussolini declared war on France and England, and no more ships were able to leave Italy, so no others could escape.

When Lydia came to the United States, she was very motivated to be just like all the other American girls. When she got here she studied day and night from an encyclopedia to learn English. In September, only three months after arriving, she had learned enough English to be able to attend regular American high school. To this day, she is very upset that her English teacher refused to give her the A she earned, saying "how would it look

in front of the other children who were born to the English language?" In her quest to be fully American, she found that her next obstacle was the need to replace her wardrobe. She finally felt like a real American girl after she had convinced her parents to take her shopping for American clothing.

Meanwhile, Lydia's extended family went into hiding with false identity papers as the Germans occupied Rome. Her mother's brothers owned a thriving typography business before the war. Due to the racial laws, they were suddenly prohibited from owning their business. They, therefore, gave it to a gentile acquaintance. He took good care of the business and once the war was over, returned it to her uncles. This gentile did not need to do this, but he did. Her extended family was so thankful for this kindness, that they then helped him establish a business of his own.

Unfortunately Lydia's Uncle Carlo and her cousin Sergio were caught by the Germans and sent to their death. Lydia had another uncle named Alex, who had lived in the United States for many years. He joined the U.S. army, and on June 4, 1944, he helped liberate Rome. Alex was very eager to find his family, but it was difficult because they were still in hiding. So he went to the church across the street and asked the priests if they knew where the Sabadinis were hiding, and they did. When he first appeared in the neighborhood no one came out. They didn't recognize him, and thought he was a random American soldier. Then Alex did the secret family whistle and everyone immediately came out and was reunited.

Helga Newman

by Stacey Newman

Shattering glass scares little eight-year-old Helga Newman in her Austrian home. It is November 9, 1938, the infamous night of Kristalnacht. Looking out the window, Helga watches as the Jewish butcher's shop is completely obliterated by an angry mob. Everyone is helping with the destruction; even a lady on crutches who is using her crutch to break windows.

Before this night Helga had lived a fairly normal life in a nice apartment in Vienna, Austria with her parents and grandmother. She went to a school where she was the only Jewish child and all of her friends were non-Jews. Helga knew that she was Jewish, but it was not a very big part of her life. She never thought that it would come to matter so much later on.

Because of her young age, Helga did not know very much about Hitler. The first time she saw him was when the Germans marched into Vienna on March 13, 1938. She remembers her parents listening feverishly to the developments while sitting by the radio. Slowly, her life began to change. She was no longer allowed to go to her school but instead had to go to an all-Jewish one. Her dad, who was a banker, lost his job. Then Kristalnacht hit. Police came into their home and forced her father to open the family's safe. They took everything in it, even her father's beloved typewriter.

The Newmans received a frantic phone call from Helga's aunt saying that her uncle had been arrested. Her aunt had been told that she had three hours to get out of her house. Helga's uncle, being a lawyer, knew that was not right and went to the Gestapo to complain. The Gestapo imprisoned him and sent him Dachau, where he was interned for five months.

Helga's aunt had visited England a few years before and had made some friends. These friends helped her move and invited her to live with them during the war. Because Helga's aunt was living in England, the Nazis released Helga's uncle. Helga remembers seeing him upon his return home and being shocked at his shabby state. The police also commanded Helga's family to leave their home. They moved into a very small apartment with relatives. It was at this time that Helga's mother realized the only way to get out of the country would be to get a domestic job.

Thankfully, Helga's mother was able to get a job as a maid for a family in England. This job saved her life. Once in England she continued to look for a job in a household that needed both a maid and a butler so Helga's father could come too. But by the time she found one it was too late; no Jews could leave Austria because war had broken out.

Having friends with connections, Helga's father found out that he was going to be deported. Immediately, he packed his bags and headed for the border. Walking was difficult for him as he was born with one leg shorter than the other and had to wear a wooden tilt in his shoe. Nevertheless he trudged 40 miles in the rain and managed to sneak into Yugoslavia. From there he crossed the border to Italy, where he was actually caught. He faced the traumatizing experience of being lined up. The Nazis shot every third person on the line; he was the fourth. Helga's father continued to make his way and eventually reached England.

Helga was also able to escape to England. One night, through the auspices of Kindertransport she fled Vienna first by train and then boat. A heroic organization, Kindertransport saved ten thousand children's lives. Once in England, Helga was bounced around to five different foster homes. The people generally treated her nicely but times were still hard and she was really far away from her parents. At one house she got Scarlet Fever and at another she got chilblains from the cold. While ill with each disease she was admitted to the hospital, which was actually a welcome respite because it brought the promise of warmth and food.

Meanwhile Helga's mother lost her job because her employers thought that she was an alien spy, which was a common belief about foreigners. Helga's mother moved in with Helga's uncle where they helped to do war work. One time while visiting her mother, Helga lived through a horrible air raid. Three different bombs struck nearby and it was a very scary experience.

Luckily the whole family survived. In the end, Helga lived in England with her father and mother. Sadly, her grandmother was sent to a concentration camp and Helga does not know what happened to her. Eventually, Helga moved to America where she met her husband. Living in New York, Helga tried to ignore her past and never talked about it to anyone. Then, eventually, she got involved with the organization that saved her life, the Kindertransport. She went to a 50-year reunion for people who had been saved by the Kindertransport. It is only here that she and many others were finally able to talk about what happened to them. Helga said that she went home and told her children what happened to her for the first time. Now she wants her story to live on. And it will live on, through me, and everyone who reads this.

Inge Pikarski Rosenthal

by Sarah Gafter

Inge Pikarski was only five-and-a-half when the other children in her small, isolated town taunted her solely because she was Jewish. They didn't know her, or her family, but they were taught to hate her. This was in Germany in 1931, when Hitler's Nazi Party began consolidating power, only about 75 years ago.

Inge was born in 1927, in Neurode, Silesia, Germany. Her parents owned a clothing store that was located on the bottom floor of the house where she grew up. An only child, she had no friends except her grandmother until she started school at age six. She enjoyed school, except for the hour everyday that was spent outside by herself, while the other students studied religion. There was only one other Jewish family in her hometown, so it was very hard for her to find friends that were accepting of her religion. When she was six, Inge's friend's father told Inge that she was forbidden to play with his daughter because Inge was Jewish. Inge only attended that school for two years, after which she was not allowed to return. Instead her mother found a tutor for her academic studies.

She also attended Hebrew school in another city, which required her to take a train ride and make a long walk to the synagogue where the rabbi tutored her a few days a week for a year and a half. Her family celebrated all Jewish holidays, and maintained a Conservative Jewish household. Since there were only two Jewish families in Neurode, Inge and her family went to synagogue in another city, as well.

In 1938, Germany experienced Kristalnacht, and Inge was right in the middle of it. The Nazis took away her family's store, house, money, and, worst of all, Inge's father. Her family did not know what happened to him until they received a letter saying that he was all right, and everything was fine. Of course, he was forced to write this, and it was not really true. Inge, her mother, and grandmother, were moved into two small upstairs rooms in a small section of town with the rest of the refugees. They stayed in these two rooms most of the time, with the doors locked. Old customers brought them food, and Inge's grandmother kept her company while her mother went to work.

After three months, the Nazis released Inge's father from the camp, called Buchenwald. When he returned home he would not talk about his time there, but the family had only two weeks to pack up and leave Germany, otherwise he would be forced to return. But they were lucky they had a chance to leave. The rest of their extended family that did not get out, died in Auschwitz.

At age eleven, Inge helped her family pack and ship some of their furniture in large wooden crates. Then they boarded a train bound for Vienna, followed by another one to

Brindizzi, Italy. Everyone on the train to Vienna was crying. One man was boasting about how clever he was that he had hidden jewels inside a toothpaste tube. He wasn't so clever after all, because a Nazi overheard, shot him on the spot and took the gems.

In Brindizzi, they had to bribe the owners of an Italian ship to acquire tickets for a trip to Shanghai, China. They had only the clothes on their backs and four dollars in their pockets. Most of the passengers on the ship were Jews, and Inge was able to make her first friend.

When the family got to Shanghai they found that their new house wasn't big enough for their furniture, so they left it on the street and other people living in the area took it.

Inge and her family moved to a poor section of town in Shanghai, occupied by Jewish immigrants. The area only contained six streets, but it held twenty thousand Jews, all immigrants: German, Austrian, Hungarian, and Orthodox Poles. The United Jewish Appeal helped her family, providing food, money, and clothes.

Inge's family had relatives in America who connected them with a Japanese business partner. This kind man loaned the family $300 to help with food, clothes and housing, never expecting anything in return.

Inge's parents opened a grocery store in Shanghai, which was incredibly tiny, and required them to work ten hours a day, seven days a week. While it took up much of their time, the minute shop provided enough money to support them. Inge's grandmother worked out of their house, feeding hungry people off the street. Inge helped in the store when she was not being tutored by a German-American woman who visited the house a couple of days a week.

After that, an Iraqi Jew opened a Jewish private school with a synagogue in the auditorium. The school taught English, and provided games, sports, music, and entertainment for the children. The classes were taught by teachers from England, and if caught speaking German, students were charged ten cents.

In 1941, at age 14, Inge had an appendicitis attack, and needed to go to the hospital. Her family didn't have enough money to pay for medical care, so Inge's mother went to the Japanese business partner again, and traded her beautiful mink coat that she had brought from Germany for $300 so Inge could have an operation.

At her school, Inge saw a movie of the concentration camps that someone had smuggled out of Germany. She then realized that all of her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins left behind must have perished. Following graduation from high school, Inge found work and became a nursery school assistant.

In 1947, Inge was 20, and had lived in that small, crowded section of Shanghai for ten

years. By this time, now that the war had ended, only ten thousand Jews remained in the neighborhood. Many were fleeing China because the communists were coming to power. Her family decided to leave as well. They registered with the Immigration Organization in America, but since only a certain number of people were allowed into America from Germany, they had to wait to be called. Inge's grandmother was Polish, so she was on a different quota with an even longer waiting list.

Inge and her family anticipated the German and Polish quotas calls anxiously. They received two calls from the German quota, but none from the Polish quota. The German quota called once more, saying that it was Inge's last chance to enter America for a long time. Inge's mother told her to go by herself, and her parents and grandmother would call when they could come to America

In the U.S, Inge was sponsored by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish immigration organization the helps Jewish refugees around the world. By herself, Inge opened a nursery school, and went to night school, because she only had a high school degree. Three months later, she received a letter from her parents, saying her grandmother had gained permission to live in the United States. As soon as she received the letter, she looked for apartments in the newspaper, found a small one, and purchased it.

One New Years Eve, Inge met her future husband. They started dating, and got married nine months later, and Inge Pikarski changed her name to Inge Rosenthal. They have four children, now adults.

In 1997, Inge and her husband visited Czechoslovakia on vacation, and were surprised and disappointed at what they saw. A cemetery is now a freeway, and synagogues that were burnt down have been left that way not repaired.

Inge and her family visited her cousins from New York who connected them with the helpful Japanese business partner. Although not very hospitable in person, they had helped a lot when it really counted. Inge now lives in a retirement community in California with her husband.

Paul Schwarzbart

by Bettina Rosenberg

Friedrich and Sara Ryfka Schwarzbart welcomed their son Paul into the world on April 12, 1933 in Vienna, Austria, where their large extended family had lived since the 1700s. From the vantage point of a little boy, life in Vienna "was wonderful." Paul's father ran a major department of a large import-export business and they owned a nice apartment. The family, as far as he can recall, was observant, if not religious.

After the Anschluss on March 13, 1938 everything changed. When Paul woke up that morning, the national flag had changed from the Austrian to the German standard, and Paul's family became neither Austrian nor German, but simply "undesirable." The family's apartment was seized, Friedrich Schwartzbart lost his job and to survive they moved in with Paul's maternal grandmother.

Paul was in Vienna on Kristalnacht, November 9, 1938. Although he observed his parents' distress, they protected the little boy from the damage that surrounded them. At the end of that year the family made their way to Cologne and from there fled to Belgium. It took three separate attempts to sneak across the Belgian border. Friedrich made it first, but the Belgian border guards caught Sara and Paul and turned them back. Their second time, under cover of darkness, the two succeeded in crossing the snowy border.

The Schwarzbarts then registered with the Belgian police and received residence permits to live in Brussels. However, since the family could not pay for those permits, Friedrich Schwarzbart was sent to a Belgian labor camp for six weeks to work off the debt. Fortunately, before he left, the family was able to find an apartment in Brussels, in a neighborhood full of other Jewish refugees who had also fled the Nazis.

The Belgian government did not permit this population of refugees to work. So the adult men stayed home while the women found underground work such as cooking, childrearing and housekeeping. Fortunately Paul's mother found such work as a housekeeper and nanny -- eventually for the Exsteen family, who lived nearby and were very kind.

Paul has fond memories of his stay in the Brussels apartment once his father returned home from the labor camp. Although he only saw his mother early in the day and quite late at night because she worked very long hours, he treasures the time he spent with his father, who taught him to read and write and took him for nice, long walks throughout Brussels. Paul's father concentrated on learning English in preparation for an eventual move to the United States. When Paul turned six, he began to attend school in Brussels, where he quickly learned French and immediately rose to the top of his class -- though much to the chagrin of his Belgian classmates.

The war struck their new home on Friday, May 10, 1940, when the Germans invaded Belgium. That same day, the Belgian government declared all men of Germanic descent, regardless of religion, to be enemies of the state. The police arrested Paul's father along with thousands of other Jewish refugees, and Paul never saw him again. A week later the Germans arrived in Brussels, and Paul and his mother were once again living under German occupation and Nazi rule.

"It was hell on earth," Paul recalls. Before long, he was forced to wear the yellow star and could no longer attend school. Fortunately, the Exsteens continued to employ Sara Ryfka, so Paul and his mother had enough money to pay rent and to put food on the table. They didn't hear anything from Paul's father until some time during the summer, when they learned that he had been sent to a camp for Jewish men in the Pyrenées region of France. The family was able to maintain a regular correspondence for two years until August 1942 when French Prime Minister Pierre Laval decided to turn his thousands of Jewish prisoners over to the Germans. Paul's father wrote one last letter that he threw out of a train in Lyons. In this note, which someone miraculously found and posted, Friedrich Schwarzbart told his family he was being transported east and would try to get in touch with them soon. They never heard from him again.

By 1943 the situation had worsened. Paul and his mother were the only Jews in their building. The Nazis had forcibly removed most of the other Jewish families from the neighborhood and "carted them away." No one came back.

One day, a young man knocked on the door and asked Sara Ryfka if she was willing to give Paul up to save his life. An agonizing decision, Paul's mother agreed. The young man sent Paul by train to the village of Jamoigne s/Semois in the Ardennes Forest, to a Catholic school named the Home Reine Elizabeth. For the next two years Paul had to pass as a happy-go-lucky Catholic Belgian boy. He learned Latin, served as Father Hardy's altar boy at daily mass, and was eventually baptized. All this time he knew nothing of his mother and father. "I did a lot of crying, alone in the dark at night," he recalled. Meanwhile, Paul's mother continued to work for the Exsteens, cooking, keeping house and tending to their two young children, returning to the two-room apartment every night.

The Americans liberated Jamoigne in October 1944. Paul then made his way back to Brussels. He ran into his mother while he was roaming the streets of his old neighborhood. They recognized each other from half a block away and reunited with hugs and tears. That Friday night Sara Ryfka blessed the Sabbath candles and Paul went right back to being a Jew. For him, there was no transition. Paul simply and naturally resumed his Jewishness and attending school in Brussels.

When the war ended in May 1945, Sara Ryfka reapplied to immigrate to the United States. She and Paul had to wait three interminable years before they received the necessary papers. They left Belgium at the end of 1948 and, after a stormy passage across the Atlantic,

arrived in New York on December 8th. They still hoped Paul's father would join them sooner or later. They learned English quickly and three months later boarded the train to Oakland, California, where Paul's uncle, who had sponsored them, was waiting to take them to Petaluma. Paul finished school in San Francisco and then attended U.C. Berkeley, eventually becoming a French professor.

In 1988 Paul received an invitation from Europe to attend a reunion of the Jewish boys who had been hidden Home Reine Elizabeth in the Ardennes Forest. Until that time Paul had assumed he had been the only secret Jew there. He learned, amazingly, that of the 125 students who attended the school those war years, 60 were Jews. Forty-three of the boys attended the reunion, arriving from all over the world. Among the faculty of 30, only the principal, Madame Taquet, her husband, the Major, and Paul's mentor, Pol Georis, had known the weighty secret.

On that trip Paul researched the historical archives in order to learn why the Jewish Underground had chosen to save him by taking him to the Catholic school. He found his name on their list, but never discovered the reason why he was on it. He also finally learned what happened to his father. Friedrich Schwarzbart was sent to Auschwitz, where he was given his tattooed identification number. He went from camp to camp until he finally reached Gross Rosen. From there, toward the end of the war he was forced on a death march to Buchenwald, where he arrived on February 9, 1945. Nine days later, on February 18, 1945, the Nazis killed him. Buchenwald was liberated less than two months later.

Most of Paul's extended family was gassed at Auschwitz. His precious grandmother, with whom he lived just after the Anschluss, managed to escape to London, where she survived the blitz before immigrating to the United States.

It never occurs to Paul to look back and imagine the person he might have become under "normal" circumstances. But he certainly believes his experiences during the Holocaust made him a stronger person. He learned to move forward and to persevere, to rely on himself first, and not to expect others to live his life for him. He is an inveterate optimist.

In his 2004 autobiography, "Breaking the Silence…Reminiscences of a Hidden Child" (http://www.authorhouse.com/BookStore/ItemDetail~boookid~22852.aspx) and in his personal appearances (some 300 to-date), he shares his Jewish background, family and memories as a "hidden child."

Simon and Rimma Shirman

by Amit Deutsch and Jessa Deutsch

Simon Shirman was born in Kiev, Ukraine on February 7, 1933 to Ben-tzivon and Golda Shirman. His father, Boris by his Russian name, supported the family by working the railroad. The family, which consisted of Simon, his parents, and his grandparents from his mother's side, Chaim Yitzchak and Gittel, who both died before the war, lived together in a single room of a three-room apartment.

Rimma Shirman was born in Kiev on April 24, 1935. Up until the war, she lived happily with her mother Miriam and father Israel, but does not remember much of their life together. Relative to other Ukrainians at the time, Rimma and Simon's families were of the middle class. Simon claims that these times were good and free of anti-Semitism. His parents weren't religious, but one of Simon's brighter memories of his childhood is of his grandfather giving him ten ruples for Hanukkah each year.

Simon was only six years old when World War II started, and he was only eight when the Nazis invaded Ukraine on June 22, 1941. Simon remembers seeing the German airplanes through his windows. His parents evacuated the family out of Kiev and Simon's father left to join the army. Simon's father died from an injury sustained in battle sometime in 1942.

Simon and his family moved to Mozdok, a city in southern Russia near the country of Georgia. Life in Mozdok was difficult, and Simon's mother supported the family by taking up sewing. At the end of 1941, the Nazis were approaching Mozdok, and the family fled to the nearby city of Minerali Vodah. There, Simon's mom worked in a glass factory making bottles for a few months until the Nazis approached once more, and in 1942 the family took a train to Yerevan, the capital city of Armenia, where they stayed for four years. Although they were safe from the Nazis, life in Armenia was very difficult for Simon and his family. The Armenian people were good to the Jews, and Simon went to school, but his mother had to work very hard in a leather factory, and food was scarce.

Rimma was four years old at the start of the war, and her father, Israel, eagerly joined the Red Army in Ukraine in 1941 to fight the Nazis. Israel would send letters telling Rimma of the toys he would buy her when he returned. He enthusiastically predicted the Red Army's victory over the Nazis, and his letters are full of praises for the Red Army's cause.

Meanwhile, Rimma's hometown of Babi Yar was in danger. Her father wrote to her mother that the Nazis did not like the Jews, so her mother decided to evacuate. Rimma's grandmother, Esther, elected to stay behind in her home, trusting that the Germans were a cultured people who would treat her with respect. Rimma and her mother said goodbye to her grandmother and cousins. The two piled into a crowded wagon train, which was usually

used to transport cattle, that was bound for Krasnodar. Rimma, being a child, sat on the lower level of the wagon, by the adults' feet. For as long as she lives, Rimma will always remember the horrid smell of the unwashed, bare feet. As the wagon train rolled to their destination, Rimma saw a similar wagon train of Red Army soldiers moving in the opposite direction, toward the war front. As the two trains passed each other, Rimma looked across at the soldiers and spotted one of her cousins. They waved to each other, and besides her mother, that was the last family member Rimma saw.

On September 29, 1941, the Germans occupied Kiev, where Rimma's grandmother remained. They sent notice to all the Jews and Communists to gather their valuables and meet on the main street in town. The Jews assumed the Germans were good people and would evacuate them to another city. Instead, they were forced to leave their belongings in the street and march into the woods, to a location known as Babi Yar. There, an old dried-up creek had left a sizeable ditch running along the ground. The Nazis lined up the Jews and Communists so their backs were to the ditch. They commenced to machinegun up and down the line, so that the dead fell backward into the old creek. One hundred thousand people died over three days in Babi Yar. The Soviet government did not acknowledge the slaughter, and it was not recognized until Ukraine became its own country. Kiev was destroyed by the bombings during the war, but today, Rimma says, it is a very nice city. During his presidency, Bill Clinton traveled to Kiev and honored the people killed at Babi Yar.

In late 1941, Rimma's wagon arrived at Krasnodar, but the Nazis were close behind. After a few months in Krasnodar, they evacuated by train to Baku. The train was very crowded, and Rimma clearly remembers a madman miming a machine gun and yelling, "We have to kill the Nazis!"

In early 1943, the Nazis approached Baku, so Rimma and her mother moved to Grozny, capital of Chechnya. Life in Chechnya was not a good life, but at least it was a calm life. Rimma's mother earned money by sewing for Chechnyans, so they always had a piece of bread to eat. When the Nazis approached once more, they moved to Tup, a small village in central Asia in Kirgyzstan. By this time Rimma was seven. Her mother worked in a factory that made clothing for soldiers. Rimma often thought about her father, and she hated the Nazis. She greatly admired an actress who played a partisan spy in the movies. She wanted to fight the Nazis, like her heroine did. In real life, the Nazis captured the partisan and killed her. In 1944, Rimma and her mother received a letter from the government notifying them that her father had died. Every year on May 9, the anniversary of the end of WWII, Rimma rereads her fathers' letters, and she can still hear his voice in her head.

When the war ended in 1945, there was a great celebration in Yerevan, and Simon's mother shouted in the streets, "Hitler can kiss my [butt]!" In 1946, the family moved back to Kiev, Ukraine where life in the Soviet Union was very difficult. There was horrible anti-Semitism; Jews could not have Jewish names, and the Institute of Civil Engineering wouldn't accept Simon because of his religion. However, Simon was a very bright and

motivated student, so bright that he actually did his friends' entrance exams for them. He worked as a technician before serving in the army from 1953 to 1955.

Rimma and her mother returned to Kiev at the end of the war. Rimma's mother became a boss at a clothing factory. Rimma went back to school, but never had much of a Jewish education, because her principal would have frowned upon it. Rimma did well in school, and had Russian and German friends. Ever since her second year in school, Rimma wanted to be a teacher. Usually, Russian Jews went on to secondary education, but the anti-Semitism after the war proved to be a setback in Rimma's education. She did very well on her culminating high school exams, but the principal of the institute for teachers would not allow her to take the entrance exam. He said she needed to go to school in another city, which was hard for Rimma because of the expense involved.

Rimma was very angry with the principal, so she went to the chief of the Department of Education, but this turned out to be the wrong department. She was referred to the office of the Chief of Culture, where she was told once again that it wasn't their department. Rimma says that after a while, she came to expect the anti-Semitism. She disliked work; she wanted to teach. One day, Rimma came to her desk, and Simon was sitting there. She didn't like him and found him to be an uninteresting Jewish man. Two or three days later, he brought her roses and told her he liked her freckles. They got married two weeks later on May 19, 1956.

Simon and Rimma moved into her mother's apartment, and her step-dad built a wall so that the newlyweds could have their own room. Their daughter, Irina, was born two years later, and their son, Yuri, was born on their 10th anniversary.

In 1959 Simon and Rimma worked in Kiev and started classes at a small institute in the city of Rovno in western Ukraine. Rimma took clerical work in an office. Simon worked as an engineer and got raises and promotions so that by the time he graduated, he already had senior status and was designing buildings. After five years of clerical work, help from some good people, and persistence, Rimma obtained a job teaching at a school.

Simon had heart problems and suffered two heart attacks in Ukraine, one in 1987 and one in 1989. Irina and Yuri were both able to pursue higher education, which brought Simon and Rimma great pride. In 1989, Irina moved to America, and Simon, Rimma, and Yuri followed suit in 1992, right after Ukraine gained its independence. When they saw America, they realized how poor they had actually been in Ukraine. With the better medical facilities available, Simon was able to get heart surgery, and has been alive and healthy for 13 years since. Rimma and Simon both obtained U.S. citizenship and love to practice English by watching popular classic American movies. In May 2006, they will be celebrating their 50th anniversary.

Rimma and Simon Shirman are incredible people in every aspect, and their lives have touched us in ways we can hardly express. We'll never forget the tea, candies, and

chocolates that they imposed upon us every time we saw them, or their kind and abundant smiles, or the caring and understanding way they looked at us and at each other. But above all, we'll never forget that all of their exceptional kindness and sensitivity exists despite their horrendous childhoods and the virulent anti-Semitism they endured, and as long as we remember these things, we'll always have hope and optimism. Simon and Rimma were married after knowing each other for only two weeks, but it is obvious that they were meant for each other. They share a life that has come out of the ashes of sorrow, yet they share a calm, good life that is the envy of anyone who seeks nothing but peace and happiness after a childhood of horror and insecurity, and their children and grandchildren are something to be proud of. And that is a beautiful thing to behold.

Judith Skopicki

by Ari Fine

An inspirational woman once told me, " If you are hit hard on the head, you must raise your head again, even if you know it will hurt." These words came from the mouth of Holocaust survivor Judith Skopicki, who, when pushed to the point of listlessness, found the strength to fight for her life and survive.

Born in the town of Sosnowiec Poland, Judith would witness first-hand the atrocities of anti-Semitism at a very young age, but never did she believe things would spiral out of control as they did during World War II.

September 1, 1939 is the morning she will never forget. Judith woke up that morning, as she did every morning, only to discover there was no food or bread to be bought in town. She then walked to the nearest town, Katowice. It was there that Judith witnessed the occupation and terror that engulfed the small village. Overnight, every wall had been covered with swastikas and streets were blocked off so you couldn't leave the town. Confusion churned through the minds of every Jewish man, woman, and child. People grabbed what they could, not knowing when they would be able to purchase food again

As days passed, it would get harder and harder to buy bread. The lines were so long, there was never any bread left to feed her family. This gave Judith only one option. Early in the morning Judith would have to sneak out of her house, before the curfew, so that she would be able to buy bread before the bakery ran out. If seen, Judith could have been shot. Many times, if a German soldier got bored on guard duty, he would tell the people in the bread lines to count to ten. Then he would take the tenth person and shoot him or her to death, for no other reason than pure entertainment.

Judith and her new husband decided they would travel to the border of Russia and Poland to distance themselves further from the German army. Once again, this meant risking her life by sneaking out of the city, and walking over a hundred miles to where a Jew could sneak onto a train with some luck. After miles of riding on a train, she took herself off the rail car just before arriving at the Russian boarder. Judith then managed to pay off a townsman to take her and her husband across the river to the very edge of the Russian-Polish boarder.

Unfortunately, Judith did not realize that she was already on Russian soil due to the changing of the borders. When she stepped off the boat, she was arrested and taken to prison. The next morning, Judith was surprisingly released, and directed to a train that took her unknowingly to Lemburg, Russia. She had planned to go to Moscow. In Lemberg, Judith spent many nights sleeping in fields and on the streets. Eventually she befriended someone who took her in, and give her a small space to sleep.

Then one day in the year 1941, the Russian army came to her home and loaded her onto a train, along with many other Jews. They took off to an unknown destination. The train transported them deep into a forest in Siberia, where Judith would work as a lumberjack for two years. After two horrendous years doing backbreaking work, Judith was dismissed. She hitched a ride on a truck and end up in Kazakhstan, Russia, where she barely survived, never knowing where her next meal would come from. She lived like this until the war ended in 1945.

As soon as the war was over, Judith courageously traveled back to her hometown, where unfortunately, she would learn of the many family members that did not survive. This included her mother, stepfather, older sister, grandmother, all her aunts and uncles, and many nieces and nephews. They and many other Jews would not survive the brutal and malevolent encounters of World War II. Fortunately, Judith was blessed and reunited with her husband in Sosnowiec.

Even after the war was over, life was not safe. Anti-Semites led pogroms throughout many of the cities where Jews had returned to their homes, injuring and killing many. This forced Judith and her husband to move to Germany for ten years, where they worked and saved for their journey to the United States. With the help of a nephew, Judith and her husband arrived in the United States in 1955 and moved directly to San Jose.

Then it hit me. It is because of people like Judith that we, the Jewish people, prosper and persevere today, because "When you are hit hard on the head, you must raise your head again, even if you know it will hurt."

Sam Zelver

by Aaron Wessels

Schlamik (Sam) Zelver was born at the end of the year 1935 in a town called Kalish, Poland, which was 50 miles east of Warsaw. He was born into a wealthy family with a father, Haim Zelver, mother, Eta Zelver, and an older sister, Mania Zelver. His family wasn't very religious, but they still identified themselves as Jews.

When the war started, Sam was only four and Mania, his sister, was only seven. His father was inducted into the Polish army. They knew they had to flee from Kalish, but they couldn't leave their father behind. They waited until the last chance to flee the city. They were possibly the last Jews to make it out of their town as the Germans approached.

They boarded a train heading toward the Russian border. Once they were on the train, they realized that the train was full of German Gestapo, and they were the only civilians on board. Lucky for Sam and his family they didn't look like Jews. They all had blonde hair and blue eyes. Sam had a swollen gland on his face and a German physician asked to drain it. They were not discovered, though Sam's mom was very frightened.

The family escaped out of Poland and into Russia. They went to Moscow and from there to a small village, which they liked and wanted to stay in. However, one night they were awaken from sleep by what was later to be known as the KGB. They were put in trucks that took them to Siberia. In Siberia, Sam's mother worked and walked to work with rags on her feet for shoes. The weather was intolerable; there was little food and his mother felt compelled to leave. They made their way, through much walking, to Asbest in the Ural Mountains. Here they lived in a one-room clay house with dirt for floors with nine other refugees. Soon several of the people within the hut died, leaving Sam's mother in charge of two additional children.

During the summer, Sam's mother went away for a couple of days to forage for food. Sam and another boy from the hut went to a field in the back of the house to find casabas and watermelons. They took one of each and found themselves facing the barrel of a gun. The man was protecting the house and field for a family away for the summer. The man ended up telling Sam and the boy where to go to get food to bring back for the other children. Sam remembers the sour milk and pita that they consumed because of this kind man.

The years of the war were years of constant movement for the Zelver family. Sam and his family walked and took smelly, congested cattle cars to various destinations. It was a life of running, moving, illness, and hunger. They arrived in Achisay, Kazakhstan and Sam's mother became ill. Sam and his sister had to leave their mother and live in an orphanage until her recovery. Once again on the move, they were intensely hungry. They

found a dead donkey and were so hungry that they ate it. Sam says that you don't know what you will do if you are hungry. Even today, Sam cannot throw any food out and says that food is precious.

When the war ended, Sam was in Tashkent. The end of the war did not signal the end of travels. The family went back to Poland where they were reunited with surviving family members. Eta became ill again and was unable to care for her children. Sam's aunt sent the children to a displaced childrens' home in Germany. When Eta discovered that her children were gone, she searched all over for them. Finally, she came to the childrens' home. A multitude of large trucks were lined up to take the unclaimed or orphaned children to Palestine. Eta frantically looked through the trucks, yelling for her children. She found her two children in the last truck after many of the trucks had already departed.

A displaced persons' camp in Ulm, Germany became the home for Sam and his family for two years. Here he went to Hebrew school and even had his Bar Mitzvah. During this time, they found out that Sam's father had perished in the concentration camp Treblinka. Sam and Mania received permission to proceed to the United States. After landing in New York, they went off to San Francisco only to discover that an uncle who was sponsoring them had died the day before. They were placed in a Jewish orphanage named Homewood Terrace in San Francisco. Sam spent his high school years living there.

After high school, Sam joined the Army and was stationed in Alaska. Eventually, he went to San Francisco State University but since he had formally started school only at the age of thirteen, he found that school was difficult for him. He soon married his wife Maralyn and has two daughters and now a granddaughter. He was also a co-founder of Peninsula Sinai Congregation in Foster City, California.

Sam proclaims that he was a "victim of the Holocaust but he was not in it: He was a "step ahead of it so not inside it." He says that he was "well off" during the war years, as he did not experience the atrocities of the Germans. His plight during the war was fleeing and hunger. He did not experience persecution. But his war experiences put life into perspective and created a deep and fervent love of the United States. With his voice choking and tears in his eyes, he wants to get this message across: "This country is Milk and Honey, you cannot tell me differently, you cannot tell me differently."

Sam taught me about a deep profound love for America. He showed me how lucky I am to live in such a privileged country. He illustrated the darker side of life where hunger, illness, homelessness and fear prevail. He also made me feel even more committed to Judaism and its continuance. I thank Sam Zelver for spending a memorable morning with me.

Assembly Member Juan Arambula
AD 31

Is honored to present
the story of Holocaust Survivor

Anna Maxell Levin-Ware

Acknowledgement

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Anna Maxell Levin-Ware

by Darrow Pierce and Rachel Pevsner

There are many uses for the average bowl. A bowl could be used for eating or drinking, perhaps decoration. However, a simple bowl usually doesn't mean the difference between life and death, as it did for Anna Levin-Ware.

Anna Maxell was born in 1922 in Grodno, Poland, of Jewish Russian parents. Five years later they moved to Krakow. Anna lived with her parents and younger brother Simon in an upper middle class district. Her father owned a tannery; her mother was a concert pianist. Their friends were mostly Catholics and Anna was the only Jew in her all-girl school.

Anna had a German governess who taught her sewing and German. Anna spoke Russian to her parents and Polish to everyone else. She took dancing, ballet, and piano.

As a teenager, Anna went to her share of high school dances. At one point, she danced with Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II. Anna was a serious student who hoped to go to medical school. She followed what was happening in Germany, but her family paid little attention to politics. When Anna was fifteen, her mother had a baby girl named Felicia. Then in September 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland. Everything changed.

The Nazis did everything systematically and slowly. First, Jews were made to wear white armbands with blue six-pointed stars. Food became scarce. Slowly, civil rights were taken away from the Jews. They couldn't ride streetcars. They couldn't shop in certain stores, and the Nazis confiscated Jewish businesses and properties. A ghetto was established in a less desirable part of town. The Nazis took all the property of the people they moved to the ghetto. Jews could only carry what fit in one suitcase.

One day in 1940, Nazi soldiers knocked on Anna's door and forced them to move to the Krakow Ghetto. Her father lost his business, without compensation. Anna said that she would rather die than move to the Ghetto. So she married her Hungarian boyfriend, Janos Fenyo. This enabled her to live with his family outside the ghetto.

All of Anna's family was sent to the ghetto except her brother, who was sent to the Plashow work camp outside Krakow. Anna could visit her family in the ghetto, but they could not go out to visit her. In March of 1942, Anna's father and hundreds of others from the ghetto were put on a cattle train. Anna arranged to take her baby sister from the ghetto, but the Nazis sealed the ghetto just before Anna reached the gate. Within days, transports removed everyone from the ghetto. Not until 1989 did Anna find out that most of those transports including her father's had gone directly to the Belzec extermination camp.

In March of 1943, Germany invaded Hungary. Anna, her husband, and his family were arrested as political prisoners and sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. It wasn't so bad there; three basic meals a day and no forced hard labor.

Months later, the Fenyo family, another Hungarian Betsy Gordon, and four Hungarian men were "transported" by cattle train to Auschwitz. During a forced three-mile walk to Birkenau, Anna's grandmother-in-law collapsed. The family convinced the guard not to kill her so the Nazis sent a truck to bring them all to Birkenau.

Unfortunately, because they all arrived at Birkenau by truck, it was presumed that they were not fit to work. They were sent directly to the gas chambers. Men and women waited in the chamber. Two strange women were forced in; then a baby was thrown in and the door close for a final time. After a while it opened again. A Nazi soldier came in asking for the Hungarian group that had just arrived. Leaving the two women and baby behind, Anna's family and the other Hungarians were moved to an adjacent room exactly like the one they had been in. The door banged shut. After an indefinite period, they heard muffled screaming—then silence.

The door opened. A Nazi said, *"Ihr habt nichts gesehen und nichts gehert"* --words she will never forget: "You have not seen or heard anything."

They each were issued a set of clothes: a dress, shoes, and bloomers for the women; a shirt, pants, and shoes for the men. Anna's grandmother-in-law, in her weakened state, was given a lethal injection by the infamous Nazi Dr. Mengele. The men and women were separated and taken to some kind of check-in building. Anna never saw her husband again. They were made to undress, were tattooed, and their head and pubic hair shaved. The Nazis even shaved and tattooed the deceased grandmother. The Nazis saved their hair in bags for some later use.

Living conditions at Birkenau were inhumane and horrific. People slept six to a slab in three-tiered wooden bunk beds with straw mattresses and thin blankets. One slept in one's own garments. The latrines allowed no privacy. One was awakened at 3:30 in the morning for roll call, which lasted until 7:00. Then there was 'breakfast:' a scrap of bread and some brown liquid dubbed 'coffee.' Each had a bowl with which to get "food;" really just a thin soup. Without that bowl, one would starve.

To stay alive, one had to work. Many know of the infamous sign on Auschwitz's gates that reads: "Arbeit macht frei," "work makes you free." The work wasn't easy, though. They dug ditches, built barracks, cleaned, made ropes, sewed, and many other laborious tasks. One was always told how lucky one was that they were able to work. Everyone had lice. "If you didn't kill them, they would eat you alive."

By December of 1944, the Russian Armies were getting close to Auschwitz. Some

prisoners including Anna were wakened for roll call early and loaded onto cattle trains. They were transported to Bergen-Belsen; the camp Anna had been in two years before. Many, many more people were moved to that camp than it was originally meant for. There was no room. Hygiene was nonexistent, and disease broke out. Anna caught typhus, which, ironically, saved her life. When word came of the British advances, the Nazis fled the camp. When the British finally arrived three days later, they told the ghost-like people not to eat anything the Nazis left, because they had probably poisoned it.

The British cooked up barrels of thick, hot soup, but most people who were able to eat died because it was too rich for starved people. When the British doctors realized this, they stopped the rich food, substituting mild broth till people regained some strength. Anna's typhus made her too weak to eat at all. That saved her life.

The British set up hospitals and delousing stations. Some former prisoners now got jobs. Anna spoke several languages, so she became an interpreter for people who came to the camp looking for friends and relatives. How Anna found her family and came to the U.S. is another story. When she did, it was a very emotional reunion.

Years passed. Anna married Dr. Manuel Levin. With four children, all at the top in their fields of work, and five grandchildren, she has much to be proud of. Following the death of Dr. Levin, Anna became the costume shop supervisor for the University Theatre where she met her present husband Dr. Robert Ware.

In the meantime, Anna had returned to school for a degree in fine arts. She developed an electroforming process for bonding silver and copper to porcelain. This technology hadn't been achieved before, and hasn't been duplicated since. She used this new technology to make bowls—bowls without any function but to be beautiful.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER KAREN BASS
AD 47

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

BELLA LEMBERGER RUBINSTEIN

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JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE PICO-ROBERTSON SENIOR CENTER

Bella Lemberger Rubinstein

by Pamela Epstein

I was born in Wlodawa, Poland on January 29, 1927 and lived there with my father, mother and brother. The Nazis raided Wlodawa in 1939 and shot at everything and everyone. In 1941 the Wlodawa Ghetto was created. I was thirteen years old when I was chosen out of 10,000 people to work for Chief Falkenberg. I worked outside the Ghetto digging ditches and drying swamps. I had to get up at 4 am. I was given some coffee and a single of piece of bread for the entire day.

A few days before there was to be a big action to round up all the Jews, my parents instructed me and my brother to hide in a bunker, which was a space in a double wall. I hid there but I couldn't sleep or rest from the loud echoes from the shooting outside.

In the morning I left the bunker to go to work as usual. However, this was not like every other day. It felt like this was the end of life. German shepherd dogs and the Gestapo were everywhere. We had to wait a very long time for the train. If anyone stood up they were shot. I knew I was going to die since no one came back from Sobibor. We were instructed to walk in a straight line. If anyone happened to fall out of line they were immediately shot.

The Nazis instructed us to kneel. Anyone who stood up was shot. A black limousine arrived and an inspector stepped out. Chief Ruda Falkenberg was also there. He needed 250 people to work. I remember hearing him say that we were good merchandise. I wanted to go to the Chief and tell him I wanted to work so I stood up. The next thing I remember was being hit very hard with the blunt end of a rifle. I fell down hard. I didn't know what was going on.

The Chief then picked me out from the thousands of people. I couldn't believe it. I went back to work at the Ghetto with 250 people. Thank God for my mother's idea: she would often tell me to wear my hair in braids as a crown on the top of my head to look taller and older. I know that helped me to stay alive. Children were often taken first to the crematorium. I also did not have the proper working paper because I was too young. But Chief Falkenberg told the SS I had the proper paper.

We worked until the harsh winter came and froze the ground. During the big frost it was twelve degrees below zero. The bread rations I received would freeze. The winds were very strong. I still had to walk twelve kilometers to work. They would not allow us to make fires. We would often get back from work very late. It was so cold I felt as though my bones would break. The wind would come through the barracks and was very cold. During this time the beating and shootings were frequent.

The spring came and brought with it the sun. For me it did not matter, it still felt like winter. One Friday morning a bomb exploded at work. I went outside and ducked. I screamed into the barracks to tell everyone to get up and get dressed. The SS were coming. I barely made it into the barracks and went through a hole to hide underground. The SS came into the barracks and started ransacking, taking whatever there was, which was not much. They brought in sniffing dogs to check for any humans. I could hear shooting from above. We stayed underground for days without food and water. On the fifth day the swords of hunger or death were our only two choices. We had to make a decision. We left the barracks. It was dark when we emerged. There was a soft wind, and I was frightened and thirsty.

We went to another barrack. The barracks were totally destroyed and ransacked. Windows were shattered. There was blood in the beds. After seeing this I did not want anything to eat, I forgot about being thirsty. I just wanted to run away. I went to the site where Chief Falkenberg lived. At the Chief's house I went to the cellar where the potatoes where kept and I hid there. I ate the raw potatoes. To me they tasted like ripe sweet apples. In my mind all the guards were around and I would get caught at any time. It turned into day. I began to think of what I should do, stay or go. I decide to leave the cellar, I was very afraid. I just went slowly, when I got to the gate I saw Breisblatt, the work supervisor. I though this could only be a dream. Breisblatt exclaimed, "You're alive!" He was very excited to see me.

I went further and saw Chief Falkenberg. He made a surprised and inquisitive gesture and explained that he thought I had been killed with a hand grenade. He then told me "My love, now you will live." He took me into a barrack and gave me bread and jam. I ate so much, as if it was before my death. Three weeks passed. Within that time fifty girls came together. From there we were taken to work in the city. It was empty, eradicated of all signs of Jewish life. The houses were all destroyed and the people all killed. Some were still lying dead in the street.

I next worked in the fields growing tomatoes and drying out swamps. One morning in 1943 the SS came into the barracks with guns in their hands and began screaming at us to get dressed quickly, and to form a line outside. I did as I was instructed and saw dead bodies everywhere. We remained standing as they killed several people and placed the dead bodies on wagons with the warm blood still dripping. After this we were sent to work. It didn't seem like work because we knew now or later we would be killed.

While I was working a small gentile boy came over and told me that my father was not far away. When I heard the news that my father was alive I could not believe it. I took my allowance of bread and went to find my father. When my father saw me running he could not believe it was me. I ran to him and jumped on his neck and kissed him and cried. He told me that he along with my mother were in a bunker and he was trying to find food for my mother. I cried upon hearing the news of my mother. My father hugged me closely and

said, “Save yourself. At least one of us can survive.” Then he gave me his gold watch and said to me, “Maybe you’ll need the watch for bread, my child.” I soon had to return to the barracks. That is how I said goodbye to my father for the last time.

A few days later the SS with rifles in hand came early in the morning into our barracks and ordered us to get dressed and get into line. The SS put suitcases in front of the barracks. They said anyone with gold or money should give it up and put it in the suitcases and if anyone did not they would be shot and put in the cemetery. I had my father’s watch which I had to give up to the SS.

Later that day Chief Falkenberg called me into his office. He told me that the next day at 6 p.m. the Germans were going to come and take all of us to Sobibor. He told me I shouldn’t make a noise or tell anybody. After Falkenberg told me this I left his office in shock. The other girls kept asking what was going to happen to us. I was very quiet and told them not to talk, cry or scream and told them the Nazi’s were coming to take us to Sobibor. No one listened to me and they all began to yell and scream. One girl ran for the fence. She was shot and her blood ran down the fence. It was chaos. The SS came and put all of us in a line. There were several dead and the SS had their guns aimed at us and ready to fire. I was very scared; I thought I was going to die. I was waiting for the order to be given for me to be shot. Then Chief Falkenberg came and guaranteed to the SS that we would be there tomorrow and he gave an order that he did not want to have blood in his place. He said the SS could come back tomorrow at 6 pm to get us and if we weren’t there they could shoot him instead. The SS took us into the barn with the animals, chickens, and pigs and locked us in with locks and chains. The SS surrounded the barn. The hours passed by. I felt death was coming.

I was by myself. I began to not care if I lived or died. Then I remembered what my father told me and wanted to live. Then Falkenberg came in through the chicken door. He said, “My children, I want to save you.” He told me to take five people and quietly leave through the chicken door and go anywhere we wanted. He gave the SS cigars and schnapps to distract them.

I took a friend with me, but I did not know where to go. I had never been on my own before. I went into the wheat fields. I saw a lady that used to wash my family’s laundry before the war. I started to cry and begged her to help us. She could not believe it was me or what I had been through. She took us to an attic where they kept the hay. She brought us food, meat, and milk. I was frightened. I did not know where to go or what to do. I heard the SS coming, asking if anyone had seen two Jewish girls. I jumped up, left the food, and went back to the fields. My friend was so scared she couldn’t move and she was shot and killed.

I stayed in the fields until morning. I went to a road that was not longer used. A German boy on a bike spotted me. He started screaming at me. I did not know what to do or if I should run away. He got off his bike and asked me where I was going and what I was

doing and what camp I had run away from. I was so scared I could not talk. I thought I was dead. I no longer had anything to give. I began to cry and begging him to let me live. He ordered me to go three feet from him. I asked him to kill me right there so if someone came by they could bury me. He ordered me again to move. I went into the forest and began running. He began to shoot into the forest. The echoes were very loud. I ran until it got dark. I was very thirsty but there was nothing to drink in the forest. I then spotted some unripe berries and ate them. After dark I was all alone. The trees began to sway and make noises in the wind. I felt as though they were crying with me. I laid down, huddled and fell asleep.

I woke up the next morning alone and hungry still not knowing where to go. In the distance I saw boys in military clothes walking with guns in their hands. I wanted to run, but I had no strength. I just sat down. The soldiers walked over to me. They asked me what I was doing. They thought I was a spy. I began to beg and cry. I told them I was not a spy but a Jewish girl running away from a concentration camp. They took me to an old gentile lady's home in a small village. They gave everyone including me food. I begged for a little water to wash myself and comb my hair, and she obliged. I sat down to eat with them. I was so hungry. I could not eat. I was too scared. In my mind I thought they were Germans. They saw I was not eating and asked why. I told them everything I had been through. They listened and assured me I was safe.

Sometime later I met another Jewish woman, though I thought they had all been killed. I began to cry because I was so happy. She told me there were others and that they were hiding in the forest. I asked her to take me there but she said she could not. However, she told me that a man would come to take me there. I could not sleep the whole night, I kept thinking about how much I wanted to go to a place with other Jews. I got up before the dawn. I saw the man and I fell to my knees crying, begging for him to take me to the forest. He took me with him and when we arrived where the others were it was so different from anything I had seen before. These Jews had rifles!

I lived in the forest with these Jews, partisans, until the end of the war. Battles were fought and I barely survived several times when I thought I wouldn't. Others weren't so lucky.

After the War I returned to Woldawa, Poland and saw Sol Rubinstein, a man several years older than I whom I had meet there in 1941. We were immediately married. We left Wlodawa together and went to a displaced persons camp in Valdenburg, Germany. We had our first child in 1946. From Germany we went to a displaced persons camp in Milan, Italy where we lived until 1948. We had a second child, a son, in 1951 in Haifa, Israel. My last child, a daughter was born in 1955, also in Israel. We lived in Israel until 1961 when we moved to Los Angeles, California.

Pamela Epstein is a student at the University of La Verne Law School

ASSEMBLY MEMBER JUDY CHU
AD 49

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

ARPAD "ANDY" SPEISER

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THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF THE SAN GABRIEL AND POMONA VALLEYS

Arpad "Andy" Speiser

by Duoshellg Esperanza

Arpad "Andy" Speiser was born on March 19, 1926 in a town called Novenzanki in Czechoslovakia. Novenzanki was a town with a population of 45,000 to 50,000 people; 3,500 of these people were Jewish along with Speiser. He liked his town a great deal, and it made him feel more at home with his Jewish descent. Andy had three brothers: Rafael, Michael and Alex. His childhood years were during the Golden Years of Europe, and it was not until the stock market crash of 1929 that the Speiser family's life dramatically changed.

After the crash, Speiser's father moved the entire family to the town of Chesky Tesin in the Sudetenland. At that time Jewish families became the scapegoats in many European countries for their economic problems. In 1939, Hitler began marching into towns of countries surrounding Germany. Speiser's father knew that the Germans were going to start coming after the Jews and he wanted his family to be in a safer place. After the signing of the Munich Agreement, the Sudetenland became incorporated into Germany. After hearing the fighting with the machine guns all night long, Speiser's father came in the next morning and moved his family to Prague, where they stayed until March 15, 1939. The family then split up from there, and Speiser went over to Budapest.

Speiser worked as a pocketbook boy, making wallets at the local factory, at age fourteen in Budapest. On March 19, 1944, Andy's 18th birthday, the German Army marched into Hungary. The Nazis gave an order saying all Jews ages 18 to 49 had to go to a work camp. Andy spent two weeks in the work camp along side his cousin. After two weeks, he and his cousin managed to get out of the camp by faking an illness. He was released and immediately ran to the railroad station to catch a train to Budapest. Andy caught the 7:00 p.m. express train, his cousin was 10 minutes late and had to wait for the next train. Catching the 7:00 p.m. train saved Andy's life because in those 10 minutes, the Gestapo caught his cousin and sent him to the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp.

Upon returning to Budapest, Speiser was recruited to join the Hungarian Army. He was placed in an army compound which only housed Jews. In the camp the people performed treacherous jobs, such as picking cotton with their bare hands. Again, Speiser got out of the camp by faking an illness. Andy was sent to the hospital and met a non-Jewish Hungarian Army volunteer and used his name and birth date to get identification papers for himself. To a Jewish man in the 1940's, falsified identification papers equaled life, so when Andy had the chance to obtain a set for himself he made sure to act fast. When Andy went to get the papers from the Budapest, he discovered that the young man had mistakenly told him the wrong birthplace. Andy had to find the man's mother for the correction before retrieving the identification papers. Now that Andy had those false identification papers, he could apply for a job working on the railroads. The railroad company needed further

identification and told Andy to produce his Baptismal papers. Speiser went to the local Catholic Church to try to get those papers. A priest there gave him the papers. The priest knew who Speiser really was, but the priest also knew that he wanted to help Andy in any way he could. Speiser was unable to thank the man properly at the time, but he reassured the priest that he would be back after the war.

While working on the railroads, Andy was able to help the Zionist underground and make extra money at the same time. Andy met several organizers for the Zionist underground because he used to attend a Jewish soup kitchen in 1942. The Zionist organization took over the International Red Cross in Budapest and used it as a front. Andy became a courier for the organization; they used him to bring papers to and from Germany. Andy would also smuggle coffee and other war-time rarities into Germany; bribing the customs officers to ensure safe passage. Speiser's last time smuggling an item into Germany was when he attempted to bring in a stolen machine gun. However, this time he did not have a bribe for the customs officer. He was turned over to the police and put into a small cell, but was released when the Russian Army marched in.

After being released, Andy hitched a ride to Budapest. By the time he arrived, the German Army had regained the land they had lost just hours before. Speiser was drafted by the German Army and assigned to the Military Police. It was winter then, so Andy asked his commanding officer for a pass to cross the river to go home to fetch a blanket. In reality, Andy was looking for a way to run away. Russian air plane fire was very intense so Andy's request was denied, but he was allowed to travel to a 'friend's house' on the same side of the river. Speiser used this opportunity to sneak across the river by hiding in a German truck.

It took Andy five hours to cross from one end of the block to another because the planes that were flying around were ordered to shoot anything that moved. Speiser spotted a group of militia that was marching in. The soldiers were about to shoot him so Andy yelled out in Yiddish that he was really Jewish and not a Nazi soldier. It took a while for the soldiers to be convinced but when they were, Speiser was relieved. The Russian and Romanian Armies were successful in liberating Hungary.

Soon after, the war was at its end. Speiser brought ten loaves of bread to the priest who had given him the Baptismal papers. The priest was thankful that he had received the bread because he would be able to use it to help feed his starving congregation. This made Speiser happy, for he had finally thanked the priest properly. About two weeks after the war ended, the burials began. Speiser stayed to help the corpses be buried. Then he went home to be reunited with his father and three brothers; Andy's mother perished in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

In 1948, Andy Speiser and his family went to live in Israel. In 1956, Andy moved to New York, and then followed his brother Michael on to Los Angeles where he met his wife Rosalee on a blind date. Today the couple lives in San Marino, California and have three grown sons who have become a successful lawyer, a doctor, and a businessman.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER NOREEN EVANS
AD 7

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

ALFRED & SUSANNE BATZDORFF

Alfred and Susanne Batzdorff

by Amber Hamann

Significant occurrences in history are often the result of incremental changes that culminate in one cataclysmic event. Such was the case in Germany on November 9, 1938 when an event known as Kristallnacht signified the beginning of one of the most devastating periods of international history known as the Holocaust.

On November 9th, 1938, Jewish owned businesses and synagogues throughout Germany were vandalized, while police officers rounded up Jewish males to be sent to concentration camps. On that cold day in November, Alfred Batzdorff and his future wife Susanne were just teenagers. Alfred was 16 years old and arrested for being a Jew; the events that followed would change their lives forever.

Now residents of Sonoma County, Alfred and Susanne were born in Breslau, Germany. They both came from families with physicians; Alfred's father was a surgeon and Susanne's father was a dermatologist and her mother was a gynecologist. When Alfred and Susanne were eleven, Susanne's family moved into an apartment where Alfred's family resided. The families lived together within the progressively oppressive restrictions against German Jews under Adolf Hitler's regime.

As teenagers, Alfred and Susanne were creative in finding ways to amuse themselves. They were part of a group of five children, who would spend their Saturday nights together; Alfred, Susanne, her brother, and a cousin made up the core group, while Alfred's younger brother was occasionally allowed to participate in their activities. They began a self-published newspaper and would put on plays for the rest of the family. They also developed life long friendships that would stand the test of time and circumstance.

Despite the families' adaptations, life continued to be hard. Increasingly restrictive laws were passed that made it more and more difficult for Alfred and Susanne's parents to make a living. After a while, health insurances were no longer allowed to make payments to Jewish doctors for medical services they rendered to their patients. Then, some time later, non-Jewish residents were prohibited from being treated by Jewish doctors and Jewish patients had little resources with which to pay for services.

For a while, both Alfred and Susanne's fathers were determined to stay in Germany. They refused to let Hitler force them out of their country and believed that they could outlive his regime. Yet, after Jewish doctors were barred from having medical licenses, they realized that they would no longer be able to make a living in Nazi Germany and began making preparations to leave.

Both families put their names on the list for immigration to America. As an employee of the local university, Susanne's father was able to receive an exemption to the wait list and came to America in 1938. The rest of the family stayed together and held out hope that their number would be called soon.

This interminable waiting period ended with the Kristallnacht. Synagogues throughout Germany were set ablaze and violence prevailed against Jews throughout the country. These events are considered to signify the beginning of the Holocaust.

On this night all Jewish men in Breslau were rounded up and taken to the train station, their destination a concentration camp called Buchenwald. Because Alfred's father was in Berlin and Susanne's father was in America, 16 year old Alfred was arrested in their place. At the police station they were made to stand in the courtyard, where Alfred saw a lot of familiar faces. They stayed until nightfall. As they began the march to the train station for transport to Buchenwald, an officer commanded men over the age of 70 and disabled war veterans to fall out of the lineup; Alfred hid among the old men.

The police officers took the group that was left behind to an air raid shelter serving as a makeshift prison. When Alfred was discovered, there was little anyone could do as the train had already left the station. They put him to work caring for the older people and he was allowed to leave the next night. On his departure, one of the officers advised him to leave the country because when his absence was discovered at Buchenwald, he would be sought out and arrested.

After Kristallnacht, a bill was authorized in England to grant entry to 10,000 Jewish children in an action called kindertransport. Volunteer groups in both England and Germany worked feverishly to organize these children and bring them to safety. Alfred's grandmother was associated with a Jewish Women's volunteer organization that helped arrange for children to leave Germany and she was able to find a place for him on the first kindertransport, which arrived in England on December 2nd, 1938.

Soon after his arrival, Alfred learned of a provision that people on the waiting list for an American visa could acquire a temporary residence permit to live in England. One of the requirements was that an English citizen had to pay for your care once you arrived in the country. Alfred set about finding someone to vouch for both his parents and brother; he knew that he must arrange for all of them to arrive together as they would not leave Germany separately.

Alfred was able to arrange for his brother and father to be supported but he had more difficulty finding a sponsor for his mother. A woman who was the mayor of a small village heard about his plight and presented the situation at the next meeting of the village council. Upon hearing of Alfred's situation, 20 villagers pledged a shilling a week to care for his mother and with those resources he was able to save his entire family and bring them over to England.

Alfred remains visibly moved by this act of kindness. He speaks about how this collective effort of people had such an impact on his life. Singularly, each of these villages would not have been able to afford to pay for the upkeep of his mother, but by combining their resources and acting cooperatively they saved her life. Alfred's family arrived in England in June of 1939, just two months before war was declared and all immigration was halted.

In the winter of 1939, the Batzdorffs' number was called and they were allowed passage into America. In June of 1940, they arrived in New York.

Listening to Alfred and Susanne recount their experiences, it is clear that they have done this many times. The facts flow forward and combine in a natural progression to create a compelling story; the truly relevant lesson is hidden among the layers of narrative. By talking about their experiences, both Alfred and Susanne are ensuring that atrocities committed during the Holocaust are personalized and personified.

Susanne explains that the Holocaust experience was entirely unprecedented in modern history. Political change occurred in Germany under Hitler's rule so incrementally that the true effects of his policies were not fully realized until it was too late. With the advantage of retrospection, we are able to identify and isolate the precursors to tyrannical violence; it is this belief that compels Alfred and Susanne to share their story.

Through sheer luck and ingenuity both Alfred and Susanne were able to save themselves and their immediate families from the Nazi regime. In Alfred's words, "They have lived a good life". While living this life they have given back to their community and touched so many people with their humanity. They are a part of our living history and have contributed to society by sharing with us their story.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DAVE JONES
AD 9

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

JULIA BOS

Julia Bos

by Hannah Broad

"That's another story." These words served as a constant refrain during my interview with Mr. and Mrs. Bos in their home in Sacramento, California, about their series of many inspiring, and often heart warming, Holocaust experiences. Because I am Jewish, I already have an abundance of knowledge about the Holocaust. However, I could never have imagined exactly how moving interviewing a Holocaust survivor could be.

Mr. and Mrs. Bos live in a suburban home with neatly trimmed green grass and a fine old cherry tree. I was apprehensive as I walked up the pathway to their door. With my notebook and pen in hand, I rang the doorbell and soon the door opened to reveal an older man in his seventies. In his Dutch accent, the man introduced himself as John Bos. The inside of the Boses' house was as charming as the outside; artwork adorned the walls and a picture of a beautiful baby sat framed on the far side of a dining table. A woman, whom I presumed was Julia Bos, was sitting at the table wearing a brown sweater and reading a magazine. Even though I had only just introduced myself, I could immediately tell that Mrs. Bos was a passionate woman.

I sat down next to Mrs. Bos, and Mr. Bos sat on the other side of her. I had never interviewed anyone and I had planned to ask Mrs. Bos a selection of questions that I had written. However, Mrs. Bos immediately asked me to tell her what I knew about the Holocaust. Relieved that she had initiated the interview, I summed up everything I knew in about five sentences. Then Mrs. Bos proceeded to tell me her story.

"This is not the average story," she said. "My story is different."

Mrs. Bos was born in Holland, and as she described it, Holland was not always been an anti-Semitic place. Mrs. Bos was an only child and she lived with her Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, who was a saleswoman. Mrs. Bos' father was a highly skilled tool and die maker.

In 1942, all of the relatives on her father's side were deported to the Polish concentration camp Auschwitz, which was the site of the greatest mass murder in human history. In describing the deportation of her father, Mrs. Bos stated, "My father was a craftsman and he said, 'Everyone needs a good handyman.'" He took his tools with him when he was deported. Despite her father's belief that his skill might spare his life, Mrs. Bos later learned that he was killed immediately upon entering Auschwitz.

Mrs. Bos was not religious, and in fact she recalled that many Jewish people were secular at the time. And even though according to Jewish law, Mrs. Bos might not be

considered Jewish, in 1942, she was forced to wear the yellow star – known as a symbol of Nazi persecution. Soon the curfew was imposed and Jews could not be out at night between midnight and six in the morning. Even though both Mrs. Bos and her mother worked, due to the rationing that was imposed, they had to try to buy goods on the black market.

One day Mrs. Bos' aunt brought her 4-year-old son Johnny to be cared for by Mrs. Bos' mother so that he would not be deported. When Mrs. Bos spoke of Johnny her face lit up and happiness illuminated her eyes. In addition to caring for Johnny, Mrs. Bos recounted that her mother fed and housed many other relatives and non-relatives seeking refuge. Despite her mother's good intentions, the rationed food and cramped quarters meant that the Jews could never stay for long.

As Johnny grew, he needed more food, so Mrs. Bos turned to the Dutch Underground for assistance. She approached a man she knew was involved in the Underground. This man gave Mrs. Bos food cards to deliver and in exchange for these illicit errands, he gave her food cards to keep. Eventually however, a friend in the Underground was arrested and as Mrs. Bos put it, "he spilled the beans."

As a result, two Dutch policemen working with the Dutch SS Forces came to Mrs. Bos' house and arrested her and her mother. Fearless, her mother pretended soup was boiling downstairs and snuck out to her neighbor's home. She asked her neighbor if she would pick up Johnny from school and care for him until she could return. The neighbor complied because Mrs. Bos' mother was her only friend in the neighborhood. Both Mrs. Bos and her mother were taken to the prison and interrogated. First her mother was questioned and shortly after was released. Then Mrs. Bos was interrogated. With a disgusted face, Mrs. Boss repeated what the German SS Interrogator said to her, "We know you supplied cards! Who gave you the cards?" Yet even under these harrowing circumstances, Mrs. Boss remained steadfast and refused to say anything. With a disgusted motion, the officer stated, "Get her out of here." Mrs. Bos was detained in the Amsterdam prison for several days. Her mother repeatedly tried to visit her, but the Dutch police would not permit it.

Mrs. Bos was taken directly from jail to the infamous transit camp at a place called Westerbork. She remained in Westerbork for almost a year. From there she was transported to the German Concentration Camp at Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. The ride to Theresienstadt was made under conditions not fit for animals. Mrs. Bos described one hundred or more people being packed like sardines into cattle cars. There was one bucket to drink from and one to do "other business." People were allowed to bring only one suitcase. Luckily for Mrs. Bos, she was able to sit at the top of a stack of suitcases; the only place she could reach fresh air.

Once in the camp, Mrs. Bos and the other detainees were forced to work twelve hour days. The conditions were miserable; the women used blocks of wood with straps as shoes. Mrs. Boss was obviously a very spirited woman because she said at one point she broke the rules and spoke directly to the camp Commandant in German when he was conducting an

inspection. The prisoners were not allowed to speak to the German guards and this was a very brave act. Mrs. Bos recollected that the German soldiers had such a look of arrogance that she just wanted to reach out and hurt them.

Mrs. Bos described that prior to the time she arrived in Theresienstadt **in** 1944; most of the prisoners had been deported to Auschwitz and killed. However, because of the Russian advance on the Eastern Front, the Germans could no longer evacuate the prisoners. This development in the war probably saved Mrs. Bos' life. Mrs. Bos spent the remaining months of the war working in the fields and the kitchens of the camp. Although Typhus was raging through the camp at the end of the war, Mrs. Bos never fell ill.

Prisoners were completely cut off from any news from the outside world. One day in early May, 1945, the Germans simply vanished from the camp. The next day on May 8, 1945, when the Russians finally liberated the camp, Mrs. Bos and a few other women escaped with only what they were wearing. Before she left, she saw the Commandant one more time. He was hanging by a noose in the middle of the camp. After much walking, Mrs. Bos ran into prisoners of war being guarded by Russian soldiers. One of the Russian officers made the smallest German prisoner take off his boots and give them to Mrs. Bos who only had wooden slats on her feet. Mrs. Bos said this was the first moment that she knew that she was still a human being, because she felt sorry for the German prisoner. Mrs. Bos and another woman walked and took trains for many days before they finally arrived at a refugee center run by the American Army. Mrs. Bos told one of the Americans that she was Jewish and she had escaped from a work camp. The man confessed he was Jewish too. Mrs. Bos broke down and began to cry. Mrs. Bos was never sure whether her weeping was caused by seeing another Jew or being referred to for the first time in years as a "young lady."

Mrs. Bos finally ended her journey by returning to her home in Utrecht, Holland. When she knocked on her mother's door, her mother barely recognized her because she was wearing German combat boots and pieces of American, Belgian and Russian military uniforms.

Mrs. Bos was extremely lucky to survive one of the most horrific atrocities in the history of the world. When I left the Bos' house, it was five o'clock and the sun was just beginning to set. I thought about Mrs. Bos and what she experienced when she was only twenty years old. I was incredibly moved by her stories. I suddenly realized that the most important thing is that we keep telling and re-telling, the "other stories" to which Mrs. Bos referred. It is only in this manner that our collective memory will enable us to say with true conviction: Never Again.

Hannah Broad is 15 years-old and attends Rio Americano High School in Sacramento.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER BETTY KARNETTE
AD 54

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

GEORGE MAYER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TEMPLE BETH EL & CENTER, SAN PEDRO

George Mayer

by Andrea Adleman

The Los Angeles port town of San Pedro has a rich ethnic history, but its Jewish traditions aren't widely known. San Pedro's one synagogue, Temple Beth El and Center, dates back to 1922 and its early members were among the town's pioneering merchants and shopkeepers. Family ties run strong and deep through San Pedro. It's fitting, then, that George Mayer's story takes us from families in Eastern Europe decades ago to families in the Los Angeles Harbor Area today.

He knew there was one.

When he started researching his past, George Mayer knew that there was one gentile family in Warsaw, Poland who took him in and sheltered him from the Nazis. In time, he learned that there were actually three families who risked their lives to nurture his.

George was born on January 30, 1940 in Lwow, Poland. Located in southeastern Poland, Lwow was then occupied by Russia. It had a Jewish population of more than 200,000, according to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

George's father, Pinkus, was a pharmacist and his mother, Clara, was a pharmacy technician. At the time of George's birth, the Mayer family lived in the same apartment building as the Wolloch family. The Wollochs' son, Zygfred, was George's cousin "Zyg." Eighteen years his senior, Zyg was an important figure in George's life. He taught George about his early years and opened his eyes to what could have been.

As Lwow grew more threatening for Jews, George's parents arranged for him to live in hiding with a gentile family until age 2. The Mayers then took their son back, obtained false identification papers and fled to Warsaw.

Working through the underground network of humanitarians and resisters, George's parents found a young couple that was willing to take George in for a few days while they searched for a longer-term home. George's mother returned to say that she was unable to find him another home. This couple, Wieslow and Danka Czerwinski, would ultimately shelter George and raise him as their nephew for more than two years even though there was great personal risk to themselves and their extended family.

This was the only family in George's past that he knew about. Wieslow was 26 years old and Danka was 19 when they took George in. Wieslow was a pilot in the Polish

Air Force, but was not actively deployed at the time. Instead, he and Danka labored in the underground. They lived in an attractive Warsaw neighborhood, which was home to numerous German military officers. To the outside world, they explained that George was their orphaned nephew whose parents had died.

George's parents went into hiding in Warsaw and maintained contact with the Czerwinskis. His mother could pass as a gentile so she visited George, Wieslow and Danka periodically. George's father remained in hiding because of his more Semitic features.

One day, someone attempted to kill an SS officer in the Czerwinskis' neighborhood. The Nazis customarily rounded up all the nearby residents and shot them in retaliation. Wieslow and Danka fled, leaving George with another Warsaw family he would only know as his third safe guarder.

When the neighborhood of the third family was bombed, George's parents assumed that their son was dead since their building was no longer standing. Thankfully, George and the third family were not home on the day of the bombing. They left the ruined city and took refuge in the mountain town of Zakopane in southern Poland.

When the war ended, George's parents came out of hiding. Through word of mouth, George's father learned that his son was alive and with the family in Zakopane. The Mayers were reunited at last!

They decided to immigrate to the United States, to unite with George's Aunt Frieda in Los Angeles. Their immigration quest began hidden in a canvas-covered Russian cargo truck that smuggled them into the western sector of Vienna. The Mayers spent more than a year in Vienna before they managed to secure immigration visas. In early 1947, a slow boat carried the Mayers to New York. Cousin Zyg left by plane from Vienna at the same time.

That summer, they traveled west to visit Aunt Frieda and never left. The Mayers established a home in the Leimert Park area of Los Angeles. The family later moved to the South Bay. George attended Torrance High School and received a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Southern California. After his father's death in 1971, George took over the family pharmacy business.

One day, a letter arrived that would bridge time and place. It was from the Czerwinskis. Unbeknownst to George, his parents had kept in touch with them through the years. George began to communicate with the Czerwinskis, learning bits and pieces about his wartime childhood. As the Soviet Bloc began to fall in the mid-1980s, George decided to go to Poland to learn firsthand. He went to put the pieces together, to meet another cousin he never knew and to meet the Czerwinskis. He traveled with his wife Barbara, Zyg and his wife, Helene.

Their worlds came together in one intensely emotional evening as Wieslow, Danka,

George and Barbara retraced the intersection of their lives. The discovery exercise continued through Lwow for four days. George saw the location of the apartment building, the neighborhood and the bullet holes marking the attack on the SS officer. He saw over three dozen photos Wieslow had taken of him as their toddler "nephew."

He met his cousin Severin, who never left Lwow. Severin's parents were killed at the start of the war and he was raised by a Catholic family. George returned to Poland for a second trip in 2002, continuing to put more pieces into place.

In honor of the Czerwinskis, George invited the grandchildren of Wieslow and Danka to live with his family in Rancho Palos Verdes and attend their senior year at Peninsula High School. George is petitioning to classify Wieslow and Danka as *Righteous Gentiles,* a special status conferred by the Israeli Holocaust Museum (Yad Vashem) on non-Jews who rescued Jews.

Today, George has a commercial real estate services business and is a board member of Temple Beth El in San Pedro. George's Eastern European roots and strong devotion to family are characteristic of many Los Angeles Harbor Area residents. His story of faith, family, memory and struggle joins the patchwork of immigrant experiences woven throughout contemporary society.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER JOHN LAIRD
AD 27

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

PETER KENEZ

Peter Kenez

by Israel Murguia

The Holocaust was one of the most atrocious acts in history. It included the extermination of 6 million Jews, the annihilation of gypsies, the disabled and prisoners of war by Nazi Germany and its allies. Decades after the Holocaust, a survivor from Hungary claims "luck" aided him to survive this atrocity. The following is his story:

Born 1937 in Hungary, Peter Kenez was a child when he experienced the Holocaust. Peter lived with his parents in Budapest, a Hungarian suburb district. Because Peter lived in Hungary, he had little experience with the Holocaust-- that is until March 19, 1944. Peter was only 6 years old when Nazi Germany marched into Hungary. Hungary was an ally of Nazi Germany and prior to its occupation, was responsible for the deaths of 20,000 Jews. According to Peter, before March 1944, most Jews were not in any direct danger, yet Jews experienced anti-Semitism. Imposed were new restrictions: Jews were ordered to wear yellow stars, deprived of their businesses and professions, and forced to congregate in selected buildings, though not yet in a ghetto. For example, because he was a Jew, Peter's father lost his job. Fortunately, Peter's grandfather owned a printing press and Peter's father was able to work. Until the occupation, life was difficult, but not horrendous. However, life was quickly altered from one day to the next after Nazi Germany marched into Hungary.

In a somber voice, Peter further explained, "The day after the occupation, my father was stopped on his way to work and taken to an internment camp at Kistarcsa. I never saw him again." Peter's father was later deported. His father died on the forced march that followed the liquidation of Auschwitz in January, 1945. A family friend was with Peter's father at the time of his death. Upon being freed, the family friend went to Peter's mother to explain what had happened. In the summer of 1945, the friend told Peter's mother that on the march from Auschwitz, Jews were gunned down to stop them from being rescued; Peter's father was one of them. Unfortunately, after surviving brutal treatment, the family friend died because his body was ravaged from being in the concentration camp. Peter was eight years old when his mother revealed the sad story.

When Peter's father was taken, Peter's mother decided to move with her in-laws to Budapest proper. As Peter explained, Budapest was the last of five districts in Hungary to withdraw Jews. The survival rate in Budapest was over 50 percent, which was more than any other district within Hungary. Peter later recalls, "Who would have known that those who mostly survived came from Budapest." Those who didn't survive were taken at random to the front lines, work camps, or concentration camps.

As mentioned, Peter and his mother went to live with his grandparents. His grandparents' five-room apartment was a haven to forty-two people, mostly relatives. When asked how he lived under these conditions, Peter said he made the best out of his circumstances. He remembers playing with the other children in the household in the open corridors of the apartment.

In a similar narrative of Peter Kenez, D. Mesher captures the following part of Peter's life perfectly: "On October 15, the Horthy government (Hungarian government) attempted to betray its German allies and withdraw from the war. 'We, the Jews of Budapest, enjoyed a few hours of euphoria . . . for it seemed that we had survived the ordeal," said Kenez. But the Germans outmaneuvered Horthy, and Hungarian fascists, the Nyilas or Arrow Cross, seized power. The Jews of Budapest were rounded up and held for days, only to be released when pressure was brought on the Nyilas government by neutral states, and especially by Sweden's representative, Raoul Wallenberg. These same states, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Vatican issued letters of protection to some 15,000 Hungarian Jews, including a friend of Kenez's family who offered them asylum in his "protected" apartment. At the time, Kenez was ill with scarlet fever, yet his mother chose to leave him in the care of his grandmother and great-aunt and move to the protected apartment. Interestingly, the quarantine notice on his door offered protection in the name of Wallenberg and the Swedish government.

When the "protected" Jews were ordered into the ghetto, Kenez's family returned to Peter's grandparents' where he had been suffering from scarlet fever. A pink piece of paper tacked to the door denoted Peter's highly contagious affliction, and guarded the family from aggressive Nazi soldiers. Because of this incident, Peter says that luck had everything to do with him surviving. Peter later questions whether he would be re-telling his story if it weren't for him catching scarlet fever, which resulted in the pink piece of paper pinned to the door signaling his sickness; the paper thwarted the Nazi soldiers from entering the apartment. In January, Peter and his family were liberated by the Red Army.

After the war, Peter's mother re-married. Peter excelled in school and eventually escaped from Hungary. Peter came to America and was admitted to Princeton University. He then received a P.H.D. from Harvard University and is now a professor of history at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Peter has been teaching at UCSC since 1966, when Stevenson College first opened its doors, and says he has been in the same office with the same phone number ever since. In his autobiography, *Varieties of Fear,* Peter writes, "How much did I know about what was really happening? I am trying now to put out of my mind everything that I learned later, but it is impossible . . . What I remember are memories of memories: moments, situations, and events that I have recalled often."

Although Peter experienced one of the most vicious times in history, he is a humble man with an insightful mind. I thank him for allowing me the time to interview him and hear his incredible story.

Assembly Member Lloyd Levine
AD 40

Is honored to present
the stories of Holocaust Survivors

Regina Hirsch

Edith Freilich

Acknowledgement

Rachel Jagoda-Lithgow and the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust
Marcie Meier and the Museum of Tolerance
The Simon Wiesenthal Center
The San Fernando Valley High School Commission

Regina Hirsch

by Rachel Braunstein

Regina Hirsch was born in Lodz, Poland in and was one of nine children. She lived an ordinary Jewish life, attending school and celebrating the Sabbath on Friday nights. Her life would forever change after the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.

In 1940, at the age of twelve, her family was sent to a ghetto where Jews were starved, beaten, and killed regularly. 168,000 people lived in the small ghetto, originally built for only 40,000 people. Day in and day out, her family worked as slave laborers. Her little sister Sally had the task of making clothes for German soldiers, while Regina and others were forced to make cribs for babies and straw shoes for soldiers. The family was completely starved for four and half years. From potato peels to leaves, Regina and her siblings ate anything they could find. Everyday the Nazis would come into the ghetto and take hundreds of people on cattle cars to be sent to concentration camps. Regina's little sister Sally acted like a spy and watched for soldiers rounding up families to make sure they wouldn't take them away. When the soldiers would approach, Regina's family would run to the nearby cemetery and hide in the shacks and in the graves. That cemetery saved the lives of her family for four years. By that time, Regina had three siblings and her parents with her at the ghetto. Other sisters and brothers were smuggled out of the country, and one sibling was unfortunately shot to death. The horrendous conditions and treatment at the ghetto finally ended in 1944, but worst was yet to come.

In 1944, Regina and her family were arrested at the ghetto and taken to Auschwitz. Immediately after their arrival, Regina was separated from her parents and younger sister. While Regina and two of her sisters went to the wooden bunks, her twelve-year-old sister and parents were sent to the gas chambers. She never was to see her parents or sister again. Everyone's belongings including clothing, shoes, and even gold teeth from mouths, were taken from the Jews when they arrived at the concentration camp. For six weeks, sixteen year old Regina and her two sisters sat in the claustrophobic bunks and did nothing. The three sisters were beyond emaciated, deprived of not only food, but of life.

In October of 1944, six weeks after arriving at Auschwitz, Regina and her sisters were sent to Dresden in Germany. The girls were put to work in factories which made bullets for aircraft. The conditions weren't great, but the labor camp was substantially better than the concentration camp. The camp housed five girls per one bunk bed, provided soup and a slice of bread every day for food, which was not much but better than nothing. Once a month, they were given the privilege of bathing in hot water. When Regina walked the streets, not one person would look or talk to her. People would say to her, "What type of animal are you? Do you live in a forest?" To the German people, she was not a human being; she was nothing.

Eventually she was sent to Czechoslovakia, and on May 9, 1945, she was liberated by the Russians. In her concentration camp outfit, Regina found a secret passage that led to a highway and walked five miles with German soldiers all around her. Not one shot was heard for the first time in five years. After being liberated, the Red Cross provided tons of food and she and her sisters ate a meal for the first time in many years.

The sisters' first reaction after liberation was to go back to Poland and try to find any of their family members, but they were told that no one had survived and everything was gone. Americans directed them to a Displaced Person's camp in Germany where they stayed from September 1945 to June 1949. The sisters were finally treated like human beings once again. Regina returned to school and began a life filled with dancing, seeing movies, and listening to musicians play.

With President Truman's signing of a bill in 1949 that allowed for 205,000 displaced persons to come into America, Regina made her journey to North America. In the United States, she reunited with three sisters, met her husband, and now lives a beautiful life in Los Angeles, California.

Rachel Braunstein is a student at San Fernando Valley High School Commissioner

Edith Freilich

by AJ Trenk

Edith Freilich was born on November 26, 1924, in Oswiencim, Poland. Edith, her brother, and her sister were all raised as Orthodox Jews. After completing elementary school and wanting to continue their education, Edith and her siblings completed their high school education with private teachers. Since Jews were not permitted to attend public school, Edith's family, along with others in the Jewish community, hired private teachers who taught their students mathematics, geography, German, Hebrew, and Latin. Edith's family always stressed the need for education, something she would later emphasize to her own children.

In 1939, as the Nazis took over control of Poland, Edith was forced to relocate to a factory in Northern Germany. Edith was made to labor from 6pm to 6am, making textiles to be used for the Nazi uniforms and blankets used by the soldiers in the field. For three years, Edith barely got a few hours of sleep during the day. She and the hundreds of others in the same factory would receive only one meal a day. The hard work, harsh conditions, and lack of sleep and nutrition took its toll on Edith's health and strength. Although the conditions were inhumane, the only good thing of Edith's predicament, was the fact that it kept her out of concentration camps such as Auschwitz.

In December, 1944, as it was becoming apparent that the German war effort was coming to an end, the factory was abandoned by the Nazis. Edith and over 3000 of the workers were taken on a forced march through Germany and other parts of the German empire in the snow. Certainly, the conditions under which they were forced to exist became even worse than those at the factory. Many of her fellow workers died during this march of starvation, disease and weakness. But, Edith persevered.

In February, 1945, the march brought Edith and the others to Czechoslovakia. It was here that Edith found a way to escape. Edith was able to sneak away from the group and hide out in an outhouse. Once the others had left, Edith went house to house, knocking on doors for help. She fortunately came upon a family which offered her shelter and food. Edith went from home to home, including the home of an elderly woman who provided her with a room, food and other necessities. Edith was so grateful that she gave the elderly woman a ring that she was given by her mother prior to the war.

Edith stayed in Czechoslovakia until the end of the war. On May 4, 1945, Edith, along with thousands of others, welcomed the Allied forces as they liberated the country. Edith remembers speaking with an American soldier who told her that she was finally free.

After the war, Edith returned to Poland. On her return, she discovered that her brother

had been killed; however, her sister did survive. Edith and her sister decided to leave Poland for Israel. On arriving in Israel, Edith and her sister lived in a Kibbutz. In 1946, Edith met and married Isaac Freilich.

On March 10, 1946, she and her husband immigrated to the United States. Edith and her husband have two children, each having obtained a graduate degree. Edith's daughter obtained a PhD in Mathematics and is a professor at UCLA, and her son received his Doctor of Medicine degree and is a practicing physician.

AJ Trenk is a student at San Fernando Valley High School Commissioner

ASSEMBLY MEMBER CAROL LIU
AD44

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

MALA MITTELMAN

Mala Mittelman

by Leah Resnick

"You must survive and tell your story"

Mala Mittelman was born on May 5, 1931, in Lodz, Poland. She had a father, a mother (second marriage), a sister, a brother, two half-brothers, and a half-sister. She had a normal childhood, going to school and temple. However, she experienced anti-Semitism at a very early age. Lodz was a very Jewish city and, aware that war was coming near, Mala's father thought it would be best to move to a less Jewish area.

Things, however, got worse. Children threw snowballs at the Jewish youngsters in the winter and rocks at them in the summer. Dogs had also been trained so that when the word "Jew" was said, they would attack. Mala had been badly attacked by a neighbor's German Shepard. When officials asked her to identify the attacker, she said she did not know, because the neighbors had threatened to kill her family if she told. She had to take painful rabies shots every week for a several months.

Shortly after this incident, Jews were forced to wear yellow stars on their shoulders and back. Mala's father was a very religious man, attending temple twice a day. One day he was walking home from temple with his *kippah, talit*, and Jewish star. Upon seeing this, some Nazis ran over him with a motorcycle and left him unconscious. Hours later, he was found and rushed to the hospital. However, he never regained consciousness; Mala had lost her father. Following this, her mother sent Mala and her sister, Chava, to Kielc, to live with their older brother, Mietek, who was married and had a child.

Soon after, all the Jews, including Mala, her brother's family and her other brother, Marion, were moved into the Kielc Ghetto. Although many Jews lived in the ghetto, little food was allowed or provided by the Nazis. Because of this, Chava died of starvation. While Mala was living in Kielc, her mother and little brother had been sent to Auschwitz, where they died. Mala survived in the ghetto by sometimes posing as a daughter of her married brother. Marion tried to help by getting a job as a policeman; in this job, he knew what was going to happen before anyone else. Mala worked in a place where she got extra potatoes by putting them in soup. However, the Nazis caught on quickly and began checking what people were carrying into the ghetto. People who were caught with extra food were hanged both as a punishment and as a warning to others if they brought in extra food.

In 1939, Mala and Marion were sent to Auschwitz; she was eight years old. On the train, there were many loose panels, so people began escaping through the panels. Marion

wanted Mala to do so, but she could not do it. Those who did escape did not make it very far because the Nazis had caught on quickly and began shooting. When they arrived at Auschwitz, everyone went through inspection. Marion never made it to the camp; someone had told the Nazis that he had an ulcer, which was true, and he was shot on the spot. The Nazis were deciding which line the Jews would go to, the right or the left, to make it seem like she was older, Mala was told to speak with a strong, loud voice, and the adults around her raised her up to make it look like she was at head level with everyone else. Following this advice, she was taken to the side that would live and there she was tattooed A14856.

Her daily life was horrible. Everyday, Jews barely received any food—a piece of bread and special soup was supposed to last the day, and her work was to take bodies to certain areas in the camp. Everyone was so numb from all they had experienced already that there was no emotion or reaction to the jobs they were forced to do. Adults gave Mala any extra food they could. They would always tell her "you must survive and tell your story". At night, her striped clothes and light blankets were barely enough to keep her warm, and she would end up sleeping next to dead bodies—people who had passed away in the night. Classical music was played nightly over the speakers to deaden the sounds of the people in the crematoriums.

Mala stayed in Auschwitz for three months and was then sent to Bergen-Belsen. Instead of barracks, people were forced to sleep on the ground in little tents. From Bergen-Belsen, she was sent to an ammunition factory. The German man who owned the factory felt sorry for her, so he would tell her to lie down and give her extra bread. When the assessments came, he would always make sure to keep her safe and away from the Nazis.

The Russians were advancing from the east, so Mala and her group were put on a train to be sent to Hanover, another death camp. On their way, the train stopped. Americans were dropping leaflets from planes to warn people that the Russians were going to bomb the station. The Nazis fled, leaving the women locked up in the cattle cars. The station was bombed, and of the 300 women in the group, only 80 survived. The survivors fled to the forests, knowing the Nazis were there, but not knowing where else to go. The Nazis grouped the women back together and made them walk from place to place.

In 1945, Mala was in a camp in Berlin. Fortunately, the Americans liberated the camp, and she was finally free. She went back to Poland, because lists of the survivors had been posted. Of Mala's family, only three had survived: her sister-in-law, her brother, and herself. However, her brother died three days later. The Americans were trying to feed all the starving people, but his stomach had shrunk to almost nothing, and could not take in the food he was given.

Mala went back to Germany and stayed in an orphanage with other surviving children between the age of seven and eighteen. There, she was able to go to school and learn Hebrew. While in the orphanage, Mala signed up to immigrate to the United States, Canada, Britain, or Israel. She really wanted to go to Israel, but she received a letter from her sister-in-law,

who had already traveled there, saying that the British were in control at Cyprus. This is where immigrants had to go through in order to get passage to Israel. The British were not allowing any more refugees into Israel; even those trying to be smuggled in were barred.

The United States was the first to approve Mala. She traveled with a couple hundred kids, ending up in the Bronx, New York City, on November 28, 1947. She stayed in another orphanage and went through three months of intensive English. In the orphanage, social workers were trying to place children in homes, and when Mala's turn came they asked her where she wanted to go. She said California, even though she had no idea where it was, because her other friends were going there. The social worker had friends in California, the Dinin family, who had two children. They welcomed her with open arms.

Mala met her husband, Sam Langholz, on a blind date and married him three months later, on October 25, 1952. Mala was twenty-one. They lived in Pasadena and had three children and four grandchildren. They have happily led very fulfilling lives.

It was a pleasure meeting Mala Langholz and learning about her story and experiences in the Holocaust. As a child, she was able to survive these camps, and extreme heartaches. She had been told by many adults to survive and let others know what had happened, to her and millions of others. In telling her story, Mala has helped keep a part of history alive. She has a strong spirit and heart that I will never forget.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER PEDRO NAVA
AD35

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORIES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

WOLFGANG NATHANSON

BERND SIMON

The following stories are contributed from "Portraits of Survival" a permanent collection of contemporary portraits, biographical histories and archival material depicting the lives of Santa Barbara area residents who are survivors and refugees of the Holocaust and whose stories are provided here.

Ichak Adizes
Stella Better
Eric Boehm
Karl and Bertel Boehm
Renee Clement
Sally Fischbach Gertz
Eva Hartenstein
Rudolph Herlinger
Julianne Heyman
Norman (Wolfgang) Jaffe
Erika Kahn
Fred Jamner
Cesia Kingston
Josie Levy Martin
Judith Meisel
Nina Morecki
Ruth Nebel
Andrew Nichols
Edith Tanner Ostern
Martha Prince
Stan "Szymon" Ostern
Bernhard Penner
Gela Baser Percal
Fred W. Perutz
Martha Prince
Clara Reitman
Leslie Reitman
Lisa Rozsa
Sam Rusinek
Laura Rusk
George Rusznak
Julie Rusznak
Lili Schiff
Maria Segal
Kurt Singer (z"l)
Margaret Singer
Alex Stein
Dora Tanner
Mike Wolff
Klara Zimmer

Portraits of Survival: Life Journeys During the Holocaust and Beyond
A permanent exhibit in photography sponsored by
Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara ~ located at
Bronfman Family Jewish Community Center
524 Chapala Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101
www.jewishsantabarbara.org
(805) 957-1115

Wolfgang Nathanson

by Caroline Vance

Wolfgang Nathanson was born in Altlandsberg, Germany, in 1931. His father was Jewish and his mother was Christian. He had a brother and a sister. Wolfgang went to a Jewish school but his family, like other German Jewish families, had otherwise fully integrated into the community. They even spoke the same language.

Starting in 1941, all Jews over the age of 6 years old had to wear the Star of David. Wolfgang was 10 so he immediately wore the star. Today, in 2006, he still has possession of that star. At that time, his neighborhood friends that were not Jewish suddenly "took a u-turn" when they saw that he wore the star. 1941 was also the year that his parents divorced. Because his mother was "Aryan" and his father was Jewish, they were forced to separate and the boys were required to go with the father.

After the separation, Wolfgang rarely saw his mother. His father had to work in the factories and was gone days and nights; therefore, unable to care for his children. His brother was six and his sister was four years old at the time. Their father put them in a Jewish orphanage in Berlin where children were separated into different departments by age. The children were treated well except for receiving, "a lot of beatings, but it wasn't because of the Nazis; it was corporal punishment."

The hospital closed in1942 and Hitler declared Berlin, "free of Jews." Approximately 25 of these children survived the whole war. Like the other 25 children, Wolfgang was sent to a "monstrously large" Jewish hospital in Berlin. The children were free to move about inside but not allowed to leave. There was glass and barbed wire to prevent escape. However, as children, they would sneak out and then come back. His mother was living about two blocks away and came to see him twice, once in 1942 for his birthday when he had a gum infection. He sadly remembers not being able to eat the cake she brought him.

The hospital closed in 1942 and Wolfgang was sent to the Terezín Ghetto. One kilometer away was a stone fortress referred to by the name "Small Terezín" and that was where Jews were sent to be killed. When anyone was sent to the fortress they would not return. In the ghetto, where Wolfgang was held, people died of hunger, dysentery, and many other diseases. Wolfgang attempted to run away to his mother's Christian parents. His grandmother got in contact with his mother who took him back to the ghetto. Harboring a Jew in your home was punishable by death at that time. Upon return to the Ghetto, his punishment was put in the hands of a few 16-18 year olds who forced him to strip and then proceeded to beat him, leaving him bruised all over and unable to sit for weeks. The attackers were trying to find out from Wolfgang where his father was hiding. Wolfgang never told them although he knew the truth.

In addition to the beatings, life at Terezín held many other threats. The British and American bombing raids could be heard every night. The buildings were spared from the bombs though. Food was also scarce. Wolfgang was given two slices of bread in the morning with jam and tea. At noon, there was vegetable soup. To ward off starvation, he would steal "red butterflies" (tomatoes) from outside the building right around the corner from a mortuary that was converted into a camp for people the Nazis grabbed off of the street.

One day while collecting tomatoes, Wolgang heard his father shout "Wolfie!" from the camp around the corner. Wolfgang was temporarily reunited with his father. His father worked building cabins for newcomers. Then at the end of September 1944, they took 5000 able bodied men in two transports to Auschwitz. Wolfgang begged to go with them. Of these 5000 men, maybe four or five survived. Wolfgang's father was killed there. Wolfgang was thirteen years old at the time.

Wolfgang stayed behind with the other children and suffered through dysentery and diarrhea and was in constant fear of being sent to the fortress if he said he was sick. He received unidentified shots every two weeks in his arms, slept fully clothed, and could only wash himself in a long sink without hot water everyday even in winter. He built chimneys on the top of the barracks and after work would play soccer on his team "The Condors." He also assisted in dumping boxes of ashes from the cremation of bodies into a nearby river and had to take the bodies from trains that transported other prisoners. He lived there a year when on May 8th the Russian troops freed them.

He had one postcard from his mother that had her address on it. He marched the fifty kilometers to her home with a friend. Mrs. Anderson (she had changed her name back to her maiden name) answered the door and told "Wolfie" that she loved him. His sister was living there as well. They had to leave Czechoslovakia and went to Dresden and stayed there until 1946. In 1946, Wolfgang went back to Berlin. Still, he felt abandoned by his mother's actions and left Berlin for Israel and entered the Israeli army in 1948. In 1958, he went back to Berlin and started a business. In 1962, he landed in America.

Today, Wolfgang is retired and feels alone with his brother and sister living at a distance. The loss of his family is great. "Everyone on my Father's side got killed except his sister. But the rest of my Father's side of the family all got killed. My grandparents, my aunts, my uncles, they all got killed. The Germans didn't discriminate. Terrible."

Bernd Simon

by Joel Aurora

Bernd Simon was born on May 20, 1920 in the town of Essen, Germany. He was the only child of his widowed mother, with whom he lived at the time of the Nazi invasion of Germany in 1933.

In the early morning hours of November 10, 1938—the day after the start of Kristallnacht—the Gestapo invaded the Simon family apartment. The Nazis ransacked their home and forced the two into a cellar. Later that night, after forcing Bernd to clean up the mess they had made, the Gestapo returned and arrested him.

Bernd was eventually taken on a cramped freight train to Dachau, a concentration camp near Munich and one of the Nazi's first death camps. He remembers this as a "journey into hell" in which he and the other Jews were "stripped naked and forced to shovel snow in our pajamas for hours on end and subjected to beatings and torture."

While the young man was experiencing unthinkable horrors at the hands of the Nazis, his mother was frantically trying to acquire the papers that would free her son. In 1939, the German government permitted Jews to flee Germany if they could prove they had a place to go. With forged papers that his mother had heroically secured for him, Bernd was able to fool the Nazis into allowing him to leave. In fact, however, Bernd had no place to flee and returned to Essen in early 1939.

After constant interrogation from the police regarding his plans to leave Germany, Bernd finally learned that the Cuban Batista regime was accepting Jews. In March 1939, Bernd boarded a small ship to Havana with only $4 in his pocket. Sadly, his mother did not travel with him. Bernd later learned that she froze to death on a Nazi train to Minsk.

After working for a year in Cuba, Bernd was finally able to immigrate to the United States. In March 1940, Bernd arrived in New York City; he cried as he passed the Statue of Liberty. His "journey into hell" had now become his "journey into freedom."

Bernd eventually settled in Springfield, Missouri where he worked as a stock boy and assistant window trimmer at a department store for $9 a week. In 1942, he entered the U.S. army, first as a radio intercept operator and later as an intelligence officer working to bring the Nazi offenders to justice.

In 1948, Bernd married his wife, Judy, herself a survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The couple moved to Ventura, where they raised their son Jim, and daughter, Deborah. Bernd eventually received a teaching degree from the University of California,

Santa Barbara, and worked as a Spanish language instructor for the Ventura County School District's adult education program.

Bernd now is committed to spreading Holocaust awareness and teaching tolerance to students around the state. He has received numerous awards for his volunteer work, including the USA Freedom Corps' Volunteer Service Award. Bernd and his wife still live comfortably in Ventura, and he says he will continue to inform young people about the horrors of hatred as long as he is able. "I have no claim to fame or heroism," Bernd said. "I just want to leave a legacy to the generations. Knowledge is power."

Ichak Adizes

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born on the 22nd of October 1937 in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. My family was the descendants of the Jews that were expelled from Spain in 1492 for refusing to convert to Christianity during the time of the Inquisition. From Spain the family escaped to Verona, Italy where they took the name of the river Adige for their family name. In the beginning of the 16th century they settled in Macedonia.

In March of 1943, all the Jews of Macedonia, 7,153 of them including my family, were herded into a concentration camp by Bulgarian Fascists. All except 12 families were sent to the ovens of Treblinka. No one survived. My maternal grandparents, uncles, aunts cousins, 133 members of my extended family, were among them.

I was saved with my mother, father and paternal grandparents together with 12 other families for a very unusual reason. At the beginning of the last century the Spanish consul to Yugoslavia found out that the Jewish community of Macedonia still spoke 15th century Spanish, Ladino, and seeing them as descendants of Spain, convinced the Spanish government to give them Spanish passports. My father Salamon (Moni) Adizes accepted one. When the family was put into the concentration camp, since Spain was an ally of Germany, those that had Spanish passports were allowed out.

We escaped to Albania aided by smugglers whom we bribed. We pretended to be Muslims from Bosnia, escaping a blood revenge. My father was aware of a Muslim cultural tradition which he knew would assist us in hiding. Among Muslims if a member of one family kills a member of another family, even by mistake, the victim's family has an obligation to kill someone from the feuding family. If the feuding family, however, succeeded to escape it is the obligation of other Muslims to hide them. What we didn't know until 50 years later, when we visited the village where we were hiding is that the Kadi, the religious leader who hid us, and the Brahimi family with whom we hid, knew all along that we were Jews. They never disclosed this to us or anyone else.

Until the end of the war we survived because my dad pretended to be a medical doctor. Using his wits and a basic knowledge of hygiene he helped many people. In return for this we received food. Even the fact of my father not being a real doctor was known to the Brahimi family. They let us pretend and thus let us survive.

In 1948 we moved to Israel where I served in the Army and completed my undergraduate education. In 1963 I came to the United Sates and obtained a doctorate degree in business from Columbia University. From 1967-1982 I was tenured on the faculty of UCLA. In

1982 I established the Adizes Institute, a consulting organization with offices worldwide that serves major corporations and governments. I have published 7 books, translated into 22 languages and lectured in 48 countries in how to manage change without destructive conflict. My wife and myself and our six children have resided in Montecito since 1992.

A documentary, of this story "I Want to Remember: He Wants to Forget" was made by Israeli television and is available through www.Adizes.com.

Stella Better

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Vienna, Austria, July 24, 1924. My sister Trude Better was 6 years older, my brother Leo Better was born 12 years earlier than me. My father Max Mortahe Better was born in Poland. My mother Fanny Feige Better née Schmidt was born in Oswieciem, Poland, renamed by the Germans Auschwitz, when they built the camp where they murdered over 1 million Jews.

The Nazis took Austria in September of 1938, and things immediately got worse for all Jews. I saw crowds beating and mistreating Jews. I witnessed an elderly Jewish man forced to scrub the pavement with water he had to bring from the 5th floor in a thimble.

After November 9th (Kristallnacht), we knew we had to leave.

My brother left on an old ship from the Danebe with other refugees, and after some hardships, landed in Palestine. He lived in Haifa, had three children and nine grandchildren.

My parents were deported to Auschwitz. I was lucky to leave with a kinder transport train from Vienna in December of 1938; married in London 3 days later. I was in London through the time of the German aerial bombardments, better known as the Blitz.

I came to the United States as an American war bride in 1944. I have 2 sons and 2 daughters, 4 grandsons and 5 granddaughters.

Eric Boehm

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in the town of Hof, Germany, in northern Bavaria, on July 15, 1918, four months before the end of World War I. My family had lived in this area of Germany for centuries where they ran a retail textile business.

I lived a normal, middle-class, German-Jewish life until 1933 when Hitler came to power. The situation for German Jews started to become threatening. We were more progressively made second-class citizens as time went on. My brother Werner and I were no longer permitted to go swimming or to go for walks in public parks. On April 1, 1933, just two months after Hitler came to power, the Nazi Government initiated a boycott against all Jewish businesses and professionals. The public was intimidated by the presence of Storm Troopers (SA) in front of Jewish-owned stores and signs stating: "Don't buy from the Jew."

My uncle and aunt, Jacob and Blanch Oppenheimer, who lived in Youngstown, Ohio, heard news of the boycott and sent a telegram to three relatives in Germany, advising them to think about immigrating. Reading the signs of the times, my parents decided to send me to America. I was sixteen years old; I departed Bremerhaven, German by ship on August 17, 1934. From that moment, I shut Germany out of my life. Coming to America was the defining experience of my life - I arrived where I truly belonged. I pay tribute to my uncle and aunt who in effect saved my whole family. My brother, Werner, came to the United States in 1937, and my parents escaped Nazi Germany in 1941.

After completing my undergraduate degree in history and chemistry at the College of Wooster in Ohio in 1942, I received my master's degree in International Relations. I enlisted in the U.S. Army where I became an officer in the U.S. Air Force. Ultimately, I was assigned to work as an interrogation officer because of my language skills and education. This led to an assignment for the dissolution of the Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe, the headquarters of the German air forces. There, I had my encounter with history: I was the interpreting officer at the arrest of German Field Marshall Keitel. At the subsequent war crimes trial in Nuremberg, Germany, Keitel was sentenced to death and hanged. Being personally involved in the capitulation of Nazi Germany was the high point of my military career.

I met my future wife Inge Pauli while working at the headquarters of the U.S. Military Government in Berlin. We married in 1948 and had four children together, two of whom are living, Ronald and Steven. I published the book, We Survived, a collection of personal accounts of survival in Nazi Germany, which I wrote before completing my doctoral studies

in International Relations at Yale in 1951. My lifelong interest in preserving knowledge resulted in my career in historical bibliography, principally through services provided by ABC-CLIO, a company Inge and I founded in 1960. ABC-CLIO has become an internationally known publishing enterprise whose bibliographic databases and reference books are standard sources for educators and students.

Through my commitment to the International Academy I further developed my interest in disseminating knowledge more widely. In 2002/2003 the work of the International Academy was concluded and most of its financial resources were distributed to support education in environmental, biographic and global studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the Santa Barbara City College.

Karl and Bertel Boehm

(autobiographical narrative)

My father, Karl, was born on November 17, 1881, in Oberlangenstadt, Germany. The Boehm family had been in the textile business in this village in northeastern Bavaria for many generations. Karl and his brother, Alfred, jointly took over the business from their father. After Karl and Alfred separated as business partners, my father moved to Hof, a town nearby, where he ran his own retail textile business. My mother, Bertha "Bertel" Oppenheimer, was born on April 6, 1888 in Guntersblum, Germany, near Worms. Her father was employed by the state of Hesse as a professional wine taster. Her mother enhanced the family income by keeping a small store.

My parents married in 1912. Their first child, Werner, was born in 1913 (I, Eric, was born in 1918). In the First World War my father became a soldier, serving for four years. My mother recalled that the traumas of experiencing trench warfare, and being wounded twice in battle, changed him forever. My mother and father lived a typical middle-class Jewish life. During the interwar period Hof was home to fewer than sixty Jewish families, but the Jewish middle class were vital to the life of the city. Karl continued to build his textile business while Bertel assisted in the office.

Persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany escalated from 1933 on, but my parents did not emigrate immediately. My father wanted to stay with his business, which he spent most of his life building up. The big shock for my parents was Kristallnacht. That night, when almost every male Jew was thrown into a concentration camp, the police chief of Hof did my father a great service by keeping him in the local prison instead: he was afforded some protection because he was well established in the community and had been a decorated soldier. He was released from prison two weeks later. My parents understood the Kristallnacht pogroms as an ominous warning. The rush to apply for visas to emigrate to the U.S. was so substantial that their later application delayed their emigration. In 1940, towards the end of their waiting period, my parents were expelled from Hof and assigned to sequestered "Jewish buildings" in Berlin, probably in anticipation of deportation. Sometime in 1941, my father and another prisoner were shackled together, to be sent to the Dachau concentration camp. In the vicinity of Nuremberg, the train they were on was suddenly rerouted back to Berlin and my father was sent back to the "ghetto". He made a vow then, that if Bertel and he survived, he would turn to Judaism in a more committed way – a promise which he kept. I know few of the details of their experiences in Nazi Germany; my parents rarely talked about this period in their lives. I didn't see the full implications of what they had been through until many years later.

My parents received their visas to the U.S. in 1941. On their departure, at the Stuttgart airport, my parents' fate hung on the balance of a scale. Had they weighed over a certain

amount, only my father could have left; fortunately, after my mother went on the scale, they were both permitted to go on the flight to Madrid. My parents arrived in New York on June 5, 1941 on an American ship. They then lived with my brother, Werner, who was a social worker. Life in America was a big adjustment for them. My mother worked in a relative's jewelry store. My father went from being the owner of his own business in Germany to being a shipping clerk. He eventually became an entrepreneur, importing and distributing hand-stitched handkerchiefs and doilies. He also invented an innovative bookkeeping system. For most of the years after the war, he was a legal consultant, assisting with the restitution of Jewish property stolen by the Nazis. When I was stationed in Munich, working for the U.S. government, my father took time to collect old debts from his textile business. Before the war, he often allowed customers to buy goods on a long-term installment plan. Based on the records I had recovered from his former secretary, Karl collected a substantial amount of money after the war from customers who had refused to pay their debts during the Nazi period. Father gained tremendous satisfaction from having accumulated enough savings by 1968, from his restitution work in postwar Germany, to pay cash for a home in Santa Barbara. My parents' time spent in Santa Barbara, with children Eric and Inge and grandchildren Ron and Steve, was a positive highlight at the end of their lives.

Karl and Bertel reached a ripe old age; they died in 1974, within months of each other.

Helga Carden

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Berlin in 1925, a privileged only child of Martin and Emma Jonas. I attended public school until this was no longer permitted for Jewish children. Then I went to a private Jewish school. I was also not allowed to go to the swimming pool, nor to participate in the gymnastics display at the 1936 Olympic Games. I was old enough to be aware of anti-Semitism - on the streets of Berlin I saw large billboards with anti-Jewish slogans and caricatures. I remember seeing many Nazi parades, and one in particular, where I saw Hitler standing in his Mercedes - the people lining the streets in adoration, saluting and shouting: "Sieg Heil."

One morning on my way to school, I saw the broken windows of a Jewish fur store, and further on, a synagogue was burning. This was the beginning of Kristallnacht. That evening, I watched from our apartment as the pharmacy across the street was vandalized, windows smashed and shelves overturned. I can still hear all that glass breaking. In March 1939, my parents managed to get me on a Kindertransport to England. It must have been a heart-wrenching decision to send away their only child, but they had no choice - they were unable to obtain entry visas for themselves. Due to my father's severe heart condition, and because his assets were frozen by the Nazi regime, it was impossible for him to find refuge in another country. My mother decided to stay with him.

I was one of the fortunate children to find a good home with a Jewish family in England - Anne and Jack Posnansky. It was, however, a completely different life. I was amongst strangers in a strange country with different customs, and I spoke very little English. I made every effort to quickly adapt to my new environment. War broke out in a few months and contact with my parents ended.

I found out later that my parents had been "picked up" in their Berlin apartment, and then sent to a detention centre. My father died there due to a lack of medicine. My mother was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where she was a slave laborer in a factory that separated mica. My mother survived the hardships of this camp.

Much as I wanted to be reunited with my mother, this was very difficult. I felt torn between my German mother and my English family. It must have been very hard for my mother, who expressed having survived mainly to see me again. We did eventually become close, but it was a traumatic period for both of us. I realize this was not uncommon with Kindertransport children. There is no doubt that my past had an effect. Being a survivor made me very independent, and I have difficulty in forming deep emotional attachments.

My life has been good. I received my nursing certifications in England and worked there for many years, until moving to Montreal, where I worked in the operating room at the Montreal Neurological Institute. My mother and I moved to Los Angeles in 1962. There, I worked at the Kaiser Foundation Hospital and became a member of the original open heart surgery team. After studying at the first anesthesia program to open in Southern California, I practiced in this field. I met my husband, John, skiing and we were married for 25 years. After retiring, we moved to Santa Barbara.

I am aware how lucky I was to have survived the Holocaust while many relatives and friends did not.

Renee Clement

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Vienna, Austria. My memory of the pre-World War II years is living with my mother, father and older sister on the second floor of a large apartment building. We had a cook and a governess who took my sister and me to the park every afternoon. I remember that my paternal grandfather, Lazar, came often to read us bedtime stories. He was taken away to the Theresienstadt ghetto in 1942 and we never heard of him again.

When Hitler invaded Austria in March 1938, my father, Leopold, was immediately a wanted man because he was Jewish. When a Nazi came to the house and attacked my father, he fought back. Soon after, understanding the gravity of the situation, he left Austria through the Swiss border and in Zurich, got a visa to America.

In the five months between when Hitler came to power and when we left Austria for the United States, our lives changed. Because we were Jewish, my sister and I were no longer able to go on our daily walks in the park and play in the playground. I remember a Nazi procession on our street. My mother drew the curtains and we were told to stay inside. When I heard the commotion outside, I snuck out on to the balcony. I saw cheering crowds and then I saw Hitler in his car saluting the crowd. My mother abruptly pulled me back into the house. She punished me as a way of telling me that I had done something wrong by witnessing this scene; there was danger in my being out there.

We boarded a ship to America from Le Havre, France on August 19, 1938. When we arrived in America, we had no money, and could only speak German and a few words of English. We were quite well off in Vienna, and then our lives really changed, going from riches to rags.

My father never adjusted to life in America; my sister and I only saw him sporadically. It was really my mother who ran the household and took care of us. We settled in Tampa, Florida in 1940. We lived a day-by-day existence. My mother knew how to survive and in America this meant forgetting the past and beginning again. She started a business making sandwiches for American soldiers staying at a nearby military base. My sister and I worked wrapping these sandwiches and stapling on labels.

My mother's big dream was to go West. Eventually we got to southern California. We could not get jobs because applications at that time required you to state what religion you were, and my mother was sure that saying Jewish was the reason. My mother decided that we would no longer be Jewish. I got a job as a sales clerk in Kress' 5 and 10 cent store. School was difficult due to my need to work.

I married Roy Leach in the 1950s. We raised two wonderful children together in Palos Verdes, California. I came to Santa Barbara in 1982, where I have a good life and a lovely home with my present husband Dean. For the past 20 years I have worked as a volunteer with the Santa Barbara Symphony, Opera Santa Barbara, and the Lobero Theatre.

Sally Fischbach Gertz

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born into a traditional Jewish family on May 3, 1932 in Tluste, a shtetl in Poland. I am the sole survivor of my immediate family of four. Most of my relations, including two grandmothers, a great-grandfather and numerous aunts, uncles and cousins died in the Holocaust. Until the outbreak of World War II, Jewish life flourished in Tluste. The Russians invaded our city and occupied it from 1939-1941. My father Jonah, a grain merchant, was taken prisoner by the Russians and sent off to Siberia where he perished.

I was nine years old when the Nazis invaded Poland and captured our city. Anti-Jewish decrees were issued and a ghetto was formed. During one "Aktion" in the fall of 1942, 1,000 Jews were transported to the Belzec death camp and another 150 were shot on the spot. As we peered through a crack in the door, my mother and I watched as the Gestapo and police were going from house to house looking for Jews. Miraculously, they stopped before getting to our dwelling, so we were able to slip out and escape to the nearby fields. My older sister Rivka had been hiding with a Gentile family for the past year, but was recognized by a Ukrainian policeman named Schapp, taken to the police station and later shot.

My mother and I ended up in a labor camp, Holowczynce, used for cultivating rubber plants for military purposes. One day, while working in the fields, we heard continuous shooting. We found out that 3,000 Jews had been taken to the marketplace in town, led to the cemetery, shot, and buried in pits. On another occasion I recall two Ukrainian policemen ordering us to work. Several people, including my grandmother Rose holding onto my cousin Wolfitzik's hand, walked outside the room. To our horror we heard gunfire. Instinctively, I pulled my cousin Judy back inside, saving both of us. Amidst all this misery, there was a typhus epidemic, malnutrition, and a lack of medical care. Many of those who had not succumbed to disease were shot.

Mrs. Sinkiv, a well-to-do Ukrainian farmer with whom my family had done business, appeared one day at the camp. She needed help in her home, and at my mother's insistence, I went with her. This act saved my life.

The next day at dawn on March 11, 1944, after learning the labor camp had been attacked, I returned there. I looked in disbelief at the gruesome sight before me. A group of local villagers had surrounded the camp the previous night and murdered 48 people. Amongst them was my beloved mother, Chaya. My cousin, Herschel Weintraub, was still alive after having been stabbed nine times. He now lives in Israel.

After two weeks of hiding in the Sinkiv's barn with my Aunt Minnie (my father's sister), Uncle Nathan Schachner, and their daughter, Judy, Mr. and Mrs. Sinkiv, two courageous and righteous human beings, told us the Russian Army had broken through and the German army defeated. We were free at last!

Walking through the desolate streets of Tluste, once brimming with life, we realized our lives would never be the same. After liberation we wandered through central Europe and spent some time in Displaced Persons Camps. My cousin, Captain Rubin Perlmutter, a war hero in the Polish army, learned I was still alive and put me in contact with my aunt in America.

I immigrated to the U.S. in November 1946 and lived with my Aunt Rose and Uncle Max in Brooklyn, N.Y. I was awarded a scholarship and moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where I completed school. There I met my husband, Harry Gertz, and we married in 1950. In 1954 we moved to Santa Barbara where our daughters Charlene and Kerri were born. We were happily married for nearly 45 years when he passed away. I have four grandchildren, Farin, Sam, and twins, Emily and Pamela.

I have been fortunate to survive the Holocaust and to bear witness to the atrocities human beings can inflict on one another. It is my hope that humanity can learn from this tragedy so that the words "Never Again" will hold true to their meaning.

Eva Hartenstein

(autobiographical narrative)

June 1935. In my hand was a suitcase, and in it was the last connection I had with my family. I arrived in Chicago with all that Hitler would allow. Where my suitcase had been along the way is what I'm about to tell you.

I was born Eva Scherbel in Berlin, September 1906. I was the younger of two girls. My father was employed in a responsible position in an import house for Swiss manufacturers, while my mother had inherited a sewing machine shop and also manufactured articles for sale. I had a normal childhood until I was ten years old. Then, the First World War broke out. As my family lived in a tall building on the fourth floor, from my window which faced out on to the street and other buildings, I could see soldiers fighting and men carrying injured soldiers down from a rooftop. The dead and the dying were a daily occurrence. I remember the scarcity of food hovered over us all the time. We ate cabbage in different forms from morning to evening.

1918 was a terrible year. My sister Hanna died of the flu during the epidemic, and my father also died.

In January 1933 after Hitler came to power, a Nazi official came to the gymnastics and exercise studio where I taught, said: "Heil Hitler," and because I was Jewish, I was evicted from the building. I couldn't teach any gentile students anymore. I was only able to teach Jewish students in their private homes. My friends and neighbors were no longer able to greet me in public. At this time in my life, I had plans to marry - Fred Glogau came into my life. He was an electrical engineer and inventor. He made plans early to travel to the U.S. and did so in May 1934. I could not join him at the time, as I was caring for my dying mother.

I was on a Nazi arrest list because I received mail from my fiancé, Fred in the U.S. My mail was being opened and I was being watched. My privacy had been violated. I lived in several houses of my students. I would change my location at the last minute to remain as elusive as I could.

After my mother passed away in 1934, I applied for a visa to the U.S. I had to wait one year until the visa was issued by the American authorities. I finally left for America in June 1935. In my suitcases were all the possessions that the Germans would allow me to take out of the country. I came to the U.S. with $2.50 (10 marks). I was, however, able to take an unlimited amount of clothing and, therefore, I brought 12 coats with me that I would use to finance my new life of freedom.

America was not waiting for me. To try to find your way, to try to make a living was not easy. Fred and I married in Chicago in 1935. We moved to Wisconsin where we shared a house with Fred's relatives. We were able to secure visas from Germany for relatives, including one for Fred's sister who came from Berlin via Shanghai. My husband passed away in 1959; I remarried, and Richard and I moved to California. We settled in Santa Barbara in 1961.

Through my experiences of living through World War I and then Nazi Germany, and seeing the world of today, I feel that war is the worst way to try to solve any disagreement or problem. It only leaves wounds and death on all sides.

Rudolph Herlinger

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born May 6, 1913, in Tanta, Egypt. My father, Robert, was a linguist who knew many foreign languages, and as a result, he was hired to manage an Austrian department store in Egypt. My mother, Bertha, my father, and my older brother and I lived in Egypt until August 1914. We were all on vacation in Europe when World War I started and we could not return to Egypt. From 1914 onwards, we lived in a small town, Boskovice, which, after World War I was located in Czechoslovakia.

In Boskovice, my father owned a clothing factory. In order to be in charge of the shop, I decided to become a master tailor. After three years of apprenticeship at a good custom tailor and working one year as a journeyman, I attended the famous tailor trade school in Vienna to qualify as a master tailor to be able to join the tailors' guild. After that I had to serve two and a half years in the Czech army where I became a corporal. Two days before Hitler entered Czechoslovakia, on March 13, 1939, I managed to leave Boskovice on an illegal transport to Palestine. After a nerve-wracking four-month wait outside the British blockade, I got ashore on the 4th of July, 1939, in Haifa.

When World War II began, the Czech provisional government in London called for volunteers for a Czech military unit to serve under British High Command. As a corporal in the Czech reserves I served in the North African campaign under General Montgomery's leadership. Later, I was sent to England in anticipation of the invasion of France. While in the Czech army I had to conceal my Jewish identity, in case I was captured by the enemy. I changed my last name to 'Hora'. The change was valid only for the duration of the war. The day the war ended, I had my old name back.

While in England as a soldier, I had the good fortune to meet Ingeborg, a German Jewish refugee. Four months later, in 1944, we got married. The next week I was sent overseas. We were reunited one year later.

When the war was over I returned to Czechoslovakia to discover that my stepmother and brother had died in the Holocaust.

After the Communist Revolution in 1949, I left Czechoslovakia and found my way to England. I tried to immigrate to America, but because I was born in Egypt and the visa quota for people born in Egypt was 100 people per year, I had to wait five years for my visa to the U.S. I came to America on a Tuesday and began working that Thursday, and I had constant employment until I retired. Ingeborg and I were married for 54 years and we had two children together.

Julianne Heyman

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in the Free City of Danzig, now Gdansk, Poland in 1925. My father, Siegfried, owned a grain import/export business; my mother, Martha Franck, who had a Ph.D. in law, was a partner in the business. When the Nazis came into power in 1933, I was in elementary school and all of a sudden, I had to play by myself during recess, as no children could play with a Jewish child. In 1938, after being imprisoned, my parents decided to cross the border to Gdynia, Poland. It was very traumatic for me to leave everything that I loved in the middle of the night. About ten days later I took the train by myself through Poland and Germany to Switzerland to attend school, while my parents remained in Gdynia. A few months later we were reunited in Brussels, Belgium.

In May 1940 the Germans invaded Belgium and for the second time we fled. The journey took us first by jam-packed train to the Belgian coast; we then crossed the French border on foot and made our way to the north of the country. One day, to our great shock and fear, the German troops arrived. We had the fortune of being taken in by a French woman who owned a bakery where we found shelter and I learned to bake bread. One day my brother, Lothar, and I were stopped by a group of German soldiers who asked us if we were Jewish. One soldier pointed his gun at us and threatened to kill us. We fended them off by pretending not to understand German.

After the French were defeated, we moved to occupied Paris. Several months later, my parents succeeded in getting false papers to the unoccupied zone of France, where I lived on a winery. We continued our journey, smuggled by a guide a night, crossing the Pyrenees Mountains from France to Spain. Since it was dark and we were not allowed to talk, I have few recollections of the trip. On the other side of the mountains we took a train through Spain to Portugal without getting caught.

In late 1941 we arrived in New York by freighter from Lisbon. In the U.S. after graduating from Barnard College and receiving two master's degrees in International Relations and Library Science, I had a very varied career. One of my most satisfying and exciting experiences was being the first woman training officer for the Peace Corps when it began in 1961. I worked as a library advisor to many countries and as an international development consultant in educational and social projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For several years I was involved in family planning and population education in the Caribbean and Central America. I am an avid skier and hiker and divide my time between Aspen and Santa Barbara.

I have always been ready to face many challenges whether physical, emotional or intellectual. My experiences have given me depth and understanding of different peoples and I hope I have touched the lives of some.

Norman (Wolfgang) Jaffe

(autobiographical narrative)

Survivor of Auschwitz/Buna prison number 104954. I was born in Dresden, Germany, December 9, 1934, into an upper-middle class household. Until the age of ten a nanny and maid looked after me. My father Martin Jaffe's furniture department store was in the family for over 100 years. My mother Magarethe Flasch Jaffe, performed as an opera star and concert pianist.

My school years were filled with Nazi theory. As the only Jew in my class, I had to defend my religion against anti-Semitic schoolmates. In 1937 I watched my Polish-Jewish friends being forced onto trucks and trains to be deported back to Poland. On November 9, 1938 I witnessed Kristallnacht, the burning of the Dresden Synagogue and the vandalization of Jewish-owned stores. My father was a proud, strong man, with a military background. He was arrested and imprisoned during Kristallnacht, as most adult Jewish males were. He returned to us a broken man. Our furniture store was boycotted by Nazi decree. Near bankruptcy, our family store was taken over by the Nazi competitor across the street. At this time my family had tried to emigrate, but could not secure enough visas for the whole family.

In 1940, I was ordered to appear at Nazi headquarters to be disciplined for obscuring the yellow Star of David which all Jews were required to wear. In 1941, I was a forced laborer at the Zeiss Ikon Goehlewerke factory, assembling munitions. Weekends we had to clean blood stained railroad cars that had returned from the Russian front with wounded Nazis.

Within six months, in 1942, my aunt, uncle and their teenage sons were deported to Riga. My parents and grandparents were deported to Theresienstadt ghetto never to be seen again. I was orphaned at age 18. By the fall of 1942, all Jews were relocated from the Jewish ghetto to Hellerberg-Dresden, Zeiss Ikon's forced labor camp. In February 1943, we were deported to Auschwitz camp. I was trucked to IG Farben Hoechst's death camp in Buna, Poland, a satellite camp of Auschwitz, where I performed heavy construction labor. Within four weeks I was sick and dying of starvation. Through a series of unusual circumstances I was able to be transported to the main Auschwitz camp. By 1944, with luck, skill and ingenuity, I got better positions as an SS house painter, wagon driver, and photo lab technician. My life was spared from going to the gas chamber on three different selection days, due to the kindness of privileged Christian prisoners who saved me.

In January 1945, Auschwitz was evacuated. On a death march for two weeks thousands froze to death. We were then put onto open coal railcars with no food; hunger drove some

to cannibalism. Our transport eventually stopped on bridge in Dresden. I saw the Allied carpet bombing on February 13, 1945. After brief stops at Gross-Rosen, Dachau, and the forests of Bavaria, I was liberated, barely alive, in May 1945, by General Patton's Third Army. I weighed 80 pounds. I was nursed back to health by caring nuns and a POW Nazi doctor at a Benedictine cloister. I spent the next few months in the Feldafing and Zeilsheim Displaced Persons Camps. Because I knew some English, I became an English interpreter for the American camp commander, and for U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps which was searching for Nazi war criminals. This same camp commander, Sylvan Nathan, was the man responsible for bringing me to the United States.

A year after arriving in the United States, I married my American sweetheart, Rose, in 1947. In 1949 I became an American citizen. Schooled as a commercial artist, I enjoyed a career as a graphic artist in L.A., retiring to Santa Barbara in 1970.

Erika Kahn

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Berlin in 1925. What was it like to live in Berlin from 1933 on? We children and adults were fearful; we lived under constant threat. We were even afraid to talk in our own homes - the walls had ears. New decrees against the Jews appeared almost daily. From 1935 on, all Jewish children had to attend Jewish schools. I had been in a public school and that was a devastating experience. In front of my classmates, unfounded racial differences about my face and head were pointed out. Consequently, it was deemed okay to beat me up on the way home from school. How relieved I was when I was transferred to the Theodore Herzl School - an all-Jewish school. Our teachers tried hard to make our school days safe and nurturing for us.

On November 9, 1938, Kristallnacht, on my way to school I passed the grand synagogue on Fasanen Street - it was in flames. In my mind I can still hear the echoes of these shrill voices of the mob yelling curses. I fled to my school. I arrived to see it in total devastation - all the blackboards, and desks were ripped apart and burning - no fire fighters or police came to the rescue. We 25 children, the remnant of a once proud student body of 500, said farewell to our school with songs and horah dances by candlelight.

My mother, Dutch born, escaped to Morocco where her brother lived and later arrived in the United States. A few weeks after Kristallnacht, I had sent my little brother Erwin off on a Kindertransport to England, on a dark train full of kids into the arms of strangers. He had just turned eight and I was thirteen. Thanks to my stepmother, Hilde, and her affidavit and visa to the U.S., I survived. My dear grandparents Adel and Samu Fekete, and their brothers and families perished in Auschwitz on September 24, 1942.

We arrived in New York to a new life, a new language, a different culture. It was a struggle. Very early, I discovered an aptitude and liking for design. By the time I was 18 years old I worked for a New York children's wear firm as their designer. I loved that. In time I married, moved to California with my husband and had three sons. I continued my education with various art schools and universities. I worked as a Headstart teacher, as a supervising teacher at the Lab School at California State University Northridge. After finishing my master degree in art, I became a full time artist. The work I created won me recognition and commanded impressive prices. It can be seen in the U.S., Israel, Japan and Europe.

I am blessed with six lovely grandchildren. What a good life it turned out to be, how very fortunate. I can hardly believe my good luck.

Fred Jamner

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born as Siegfried Jamner near Saarbrucken, Germany on March 1, 1930. At age seven I had to be sent to school in Frankfurt as local schools were closed to Jews. On November 9, 1938, on the evening of Kristallnacht, our home was broken into. The synagogue and Jewish businesses were burned. On March 1, 1939, my ninth birthday, my oldest brother Jay and I were smuggled into France. We lived in a refugee home for German-Jewish children in a suburb of Paris. On June 13, 1940, just a day before the fall of Paris, we were sent to the south of France where we were in another Jewish refugee home until 1941. Then the U.S. somehow agreed to accept 253 Jewish refugee children; my brother and I arrived in New York on June 21, 1941. By then our father had died in Germany and our mother had disappeared somewhere in Europe.

I stayed with my aunt and uncle in Brooklyn until 1946. My mother had survived the war in Trieste, Italy, passing as a Gentile; she came to the U.S. in 1946 and we were reunited. Life was unbelievably difficult during the years I spent in Brooklyn. I worked during the day and attended the City College of New York at night. I graduated in 1953 as an accountant. I then entered the army and came to Los Angeles in June 1955 to start a new life.

I became a Certified Public Accountant in 1958 and built a successful accounting firm from which I retired several years ago. I have a daughter, Lisa, and son, Andrew, and a granddaughter, Isabella. My wife Margareta and I came to Santa Barbara in 1995 and life is a lot better now than when it all started in the 1930s.

There's a deep hurt somewhere when you've been a refugee - when your country kicks you out and wants to kill you. You always feel like you're a wanderer. You always have one bag packed mentally.

Cesia Kingston

(autobiographical narrative)

By all accounts I lived a happy childhood surrounded by family and friends. I was born into a Zionist family, the second child of five. My parents owned a restaurant in Lodz, Poland. My life was filled with Jewish school, reading and friends. I was a shy girl, just beginning to develop an interest in boys when my life was shattered.

In September of 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Quickly, quickly, pain and intense suffering befell our family. We were forced into the Lodz ghetto to live lives filled with misery. All around us we saw starvation, rampant illness, horrifying living conditions and death. My days were no longer filled with school, reading and friends. I was now 14 years old and forced to work in order to receive food rations. My first job was in a leather factory making goods for the German army. My hands often bled and, no matter how hard I tried, I worked too slowly to make the required quota in order to receive my food rations.

My parents tried to maintain some semblance of normal family life. Our family pooled our food so that one child would eat just enough not to be hungry that day. This plan quickly failed. With each new increase in work quotas came a decrease in food rations and there was not enough food to make this plan work. I spent much time longing for a potato peel. My baby sister was born in the ghetto. I spent hours describing to her how a flower looked and how an egg tasted. I also promised her that one day she would taste chocolate. I think she believed me. She was killed in Auschwitz at the age of three never knowing what it was like not to be hungry.

In August of 1944, our misery intensified. We were herded into cattle cars destined for Auschwitz - one of the last transports out of the ghetto. At the point of Dr. Mengele's baton, my mother and baby sister were pushed to the left, my older sister Nadzia and I were pushed to the right. Amidst unfathomable chaos, my mother told us, "You two can survive if you stay together. I am going to stay with the baby." It was the last time I saw my mother and baby sister. My parents, one brother and one sister were killed in Auschwitz. Nadzia and I somehow survived the incomprehensible pain of Auschwitz, and were sent to another concentration camp named Stutthof. In January 1945, after three degrading, dehumanizing months there, we were forced on a death march to the Baltic Sea. All around us, women were dying from starvation and the cold since we walked barefoot in the snow with little clothing. Those who could not keep up were shot. When we reached the water the Nazis were pushing everyone onto boats that were riddled with holes so that everyone would drown. Somehow, at the moment we were being forced onto the boat, the Allied forces flew overhead. We ran to hide. My sister and I spent the remainder of the war in a series of labor camps posing as Catholic girls.

After the war I returned to Lodz where I met and married my husband Morrie Kingston. In 1948 we immigrated to the U.S., making our home in Los Angeles. After three days in Los Angeles, my husband started working hauling crates of shoes at a warehouse - we immediately began creating our American lives. We built a successful knitting mill business. We are proud parents of two grown children and delighted to be the grandparents of four. My American dream was for my children to be educated. That dream became reality. I constantly remind them that it is their obligation to lead the opposition wherever and whenever injustice and discrimination appears.

Josie Levy Martin

(autobiographical narrative)

In 1935, two years after Hitler came to power, my parents came to Sarreguemines, France from Germany. This town had a complicated history, being sometimes under German rule, sometimes under French. By the time I was born in 1938 into my observant Jewish family, the threat of war was looming.

After the war began, my parents had to flee from their comfortable home and were settled in the small town of Montbron, near Limoges. It was relatively safe in the Non-Occupied Zone of France. Until late 1943, my parents stayed out of harm's way by keeping a low profile and concealing their identity from both Nazis and French collaborators.

In the winter of 1943, the Nazis began to come through our village in search of the Resistance, the Maquies, who were aggressively countering the Germans. We were often forced to hide on distant farms, in fields, in barns—wherever we could find shelter. My parents had befriended some of the villagers and were never betrayed. As these searches became more frequent and pressing, the danger grew, and my parents sadly concluded that they'd be unlikely to escape. Like many European Jews, they sought to save their child, even while expecting that they themselves would not survive.

The LeRoi family, whom they had befriended, proposed sending me into the care of a nun, Soeur St. Cybard. Because she had been an active member of the Resistance, she had been demoted from her previous post and sent to serve a tiny village 50 km away. My parents were persuaded I would be safe with her. When Madame LeRoi contacted Soeur St. Cybard to ask if she would take in a Jewish child for safekeeping, she immediately agreed. After much trepidation, my parents took me to Lesterpo in January 1944, after changing my name from the very Jewish-sounding Levy to L'Or. Also, my father prepared a letter to relatives in the U.S. explaining my whereabouts should they not survive.

I found myself living alone in Catholic school among strangers with the formidable Soeur St. Cybard in her long black halite and fluted headpiece. She was stern, but I grew deeply attached to her. I was not yet six.

I spent eight long months in Lesterpo. Unbeknownst to the nun, one of her lay teachers was a collaborator, which put me in even greater danger. Also Lesterpo was near Oradour, the village that was massacred one June afternoon with more than 600 civilians killed, including all the women and children. My parents feared even more for my safety.

After Paris was liberated in August 1944, they came to get me, but I pretended to not

know them, feeling that I'd been abandoned. Three years later we came to Los Angeles, where we settled into a working class neighborhood. I was nine and all I wanted was to become American and shed any hint of my past. I was the only Jewish child at my school and I did not speak English. It was a difficult time.

I went to UCLA, became a teacher, and later, a school psychologist. These vocations were not accidental choices, but very likely an effort to address the many unresolved issues about my lost childhood. I married and have one son. I wrote the book, *Never Tell Your Name*, the story of having been a hidden child, both for the record, and to honor the remarkable Soeur St. Cybard. Sharing this with interested people has been a most rewarding and gratifying experience.

Judith Meisel

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Josvainai, Lithuania on February 7, 1929. We were ordinary people deeply rooted in Judaism. My father was a lumber and cattle merchant in our shtetl. I was the youngest of three children. My mother schooled us at home. Anti-Semitism was always there, but as soon as the Germans came in June 1941, things got even worse. I remember going to get bread and seeing a Jewish man being beaten and his beard being torn; people were watching and seemed to be happy. People were throwing stones at us and spitting on us.

In July 1941, when I was 12, all of my family was taken to the Kovno ghetto. Conditions were very bad - overcrowded, and with very little food. Everyone was hungry. Because I was blond, blue-eyed, and spoke Lithuanian, I was recruited as a smuggler. At night I went out of the ghetto through a hole in the barbed wire fence which surrounded the ghetto. I smuggled in bread and butter in my underpants and under my arm. During the day I worked as a slave laborer at a factory which produced rubber boots for the German Army. For this I received one piece of bread. We feared that none of us would come out alive, that no one would be left as a witness.

In June of 1944, we were transported to the Stutthof concentration camp. When we arrived we were undressed, given a striped uniform and clogs. My mother's three gold teeth were pulled out. My hair was torn out. One of the first things I saw at Stutthof was a guard killing a baby that a woman was trying to hide under her dress. Chava, whom I shared a bunk with, always held a baby's shoe in her hand. One day a woman guard forced Chava to open her hand. When she refused, she was shot in the head.

Every day we got up, and stood at attention for hours; people were selected for work or for death. On this one day, I stood with my mother, and we were told to get undressed. My mother and I walked holding hands. My mother was in the entrance of the gas chamber; as I was approaching there was a guard. He said: "Get out! Pig, dog," in German. My mother then said: "Run, run..." in Yiddish. As I ran out I was lucky that the guard didn't see me or I would have been shot. Nearby five women were taking dresses off the corpses. They dressed me, and then I ran back to the barrack. That was the last time I saw my mother.

At the very end of 1944 all those able to walk were taken on a death march. If you didn't walk you were shot. I was with my sister; she was very sick. I said to her: "Walk, we're going to live, we're going to live." Our death march came under heavy bombardment by the Russian forces - they thought we were a row of German troops. My sister and I fell into a ditch. We walked to a house; a woman clothed and fed us, but then told a Russian

prisoner of war to take us to an area to be killed. The man instead took us by horse to the narrowest part of the Vistula River. We crawled on our hands and knees along the ice to the other side. There was a convent on the other side of the river. The nuns bathed and fed us, and gave us new clothes and then told us they needed to baptize and convert us in order to stay. But we decided to leave. We only wanted to survive as Jews. Nothing else mattered.

In a little town outside Danzig, my sister and I disguised ourselves as Lithuanian Catholics and found work doing odd jobs in a Wehrmacht station. We slept in a barn, received little food and no money for all our work. When the area was evacuated, we were put on boats to Denmark. The ship was torpedoed and my sister and I found ourselves in the ocean holding on to wooden planks. Some time later we were rescued by people in a small boat. They gave me a blanket which I have kept to this day. My sister and I arrived in Denmark. I was liberated on May 5, 1945, at 10:00 a.m. by the British. I was 16 years old, weighed 47 pounds and had tuberculosis. I was two and a half years recovering in a sanitarium in Denmark. I owe my life to Denmark. They put a beacon of light in the darkest hours of that time. One hundred and forty six members of my family in Lithuania did not survive. They were all shot in a mass grave.

In 1949, on the boat to Canada I met my first husband Gabe Cohen. I was reunited with my brother who survived Dachau, and later my sister and her family joined us in Toronto. We moved to the U.S. to Philadelphia. I have three wonderful children and seven wonderful grandchildren. I remarried in 1976 to Fred. I received my degree in Early Childhood Education from Temple University and I started a pre-school here in Santa Barbara.

I became deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. after watching on TV a mob of people taunting an African-American couple who in 1961 had moved into Folcroft, an all-white blue-collar neighborhood. I participated in and helped to organize the March on Washington, at which time I met and spoke with Dr. Martin Luther King.

I spend much of my time now going to high schools, colleges and teacher training seminars all over the country where I show the documentary about my life, Tak for Alt. I speak in memory of those who did not survive.

What I went through during the Holocaust empowered me do something to make the world better. One person can do a lot. It all starts with one person. Thank God that I survived.

Nina Morecki

(autobiographical narrative)

My life began in 1920 in a beautiful, cultured city in eastern Poland named L'vov. I was born into a highly successful business family as the youngest of three girls. My early years consisted of friends, good schools, beautiful clothes and a mother and older sister who adored me. My father, Wiktor Grutz, owned a soap factory; my mother, Rosa, worked in our soap and candle store. My dream was to immigrate to Palestine and study medicine. When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, my dream, my country, my family and my life were torn apart.

L'vov was a war zone between the Russians and Germans. When the Russians were in control my father was taken to Siberia. Soon after, I told my mother, "Mama, the good years are gone." I learned Russian and studied accounting to obtain an office job. In 1941, after the Germans pushed the Russians back, the true nightmare began. My mother was murdered, I lost my sisters and their families, and I was sent to the Janowska concentration camp. When the Germans liquidated the camp by shooting us in the forest I fainted and awoke among dead and dying bodies. I escaped through the forest and encountered a farmer willing to help and feed me. Afterwards, I began working for the Germans in a post office, but also assisted in the underground. I secretly, and with great risk, stamped travel papers for members of the resistance, allowing them to travel through German-occupied territories. Though I was risking my life, I was willing to do this, and I did it well.

In 1944 I realized it was time for me to escape, and on New Year's Eve I ran away. I went to Romania where I worked with a Russian medical unit near the Russian Front scrubbing floors, washing dishpans and taking care of wounded soldiers. It was during this time that I met my future husband, Josef Morecki, a Jewish soldier in the Russian army. After he was sent with his unit to Berlin, I moved with the medical until closer to L'vov and in 1945, I left the Russian medical unit and traveled home in a cattle train.

Home was not what it used to be. All was gone. No one had survived, not my beautiful family, nor my beautiful city. I had traveled through Poland, Russia and Romania, finding what jobs I could, fighting constant hunger and fear, assuming false identities, taking risks and trying to stay alive, escaping when it became too dangerous to stay put, hoping to find others who had survived. But this was not to be. Then one night, unexpectedly, a knock came on my door and there stood Josef. We married in Katowice, Poland, and traveled to a Displaced Persons Camp in Austria, from where we were to travel, illegally, to Palestine. Unfortunately, I took ill with scarlet fever and meningitis, and once again, my dream of going to Palestine was not to be. Eventually, in 1947, we immigrated to New York, where Josef worked as a butcher and I in a candy store. With time, Josef, a superb businessman,

opened a hosiery business and things became a bit easier. We had two daughters, and eventually moved to California and remained together for 42 years until he died in 1988. We made good lives for ourselves and our children.

The scars of the war were eased but never erased. Today my goal is to "never forget" the tragedy that my people and I suffered, and to speak about this to young people to fight bigotry, hatred and prejudice, and create life with respect and love.

Ruth Nebel

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born February 23, 1919 in Marburg, near Frankfurt, Germany. My father was very religious; my mother kept the Sabbath every week. After Hitler took power, the town was full of hate towards Jews. Businesses and homes were looted. My father said: "What can Hitler do to me? I am an honest man." My father and mother, my two sisters and all my uncles and aunts, I had a large family, they all went to Auschwitz. They never came back.

In December 1941, while I was living in Hamburg, all Jews were ordered to report to a local school building and to leave everything behind except some personal belongings. All things of value had already been confiscated. I took only some warm clothing. For one week we traveled by train with no food, terrified, weak and feeling forsaken. I arrived at a concentration camp in Riga, Latvia, called Jungfernhof. I was four years in concentration camps in Riga, Stutthoff in Poland, and Thorn in Poland. There was often no food or water. Every day was full of worry, and I survived this condition.

One day in Thorn, I thought I would crawl on my stomach and touch the electric wire, but another prisoner stopped me from doing this. I didn't want to live. I had typhus and I was sick. I wanted my life to end. My family was taken away from me. This was the worst thing that happened.

After I was liberated from Stutthoff by the Russian army in April 1945, I made my way to Germany to look for my family. I met my future husband, Hans Nebel during this time. Hans had survived in Auschwitz for three years as a tailor for the SS. We had one of the first postwar Jewish weddings in Germany

My husband and I decided that we cannot stay in Germany. We must come to America. When we saw the Statue of Liberty, we felt as though she was waiting there just for us, and that her torch was just for us, giving light where for so long our lives had been in complete darkness.

Andrew Nichols

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born Andras Miklos, June 20, 1914, in Ungvar, Hungary, three months before the start of the First World War. My father Zoltan, a lawyer, and my uncle Moric Mandel, a doctor, became officers in the Hungarian Army. Before I was three years old, my mother died of peritonitis. With both my parents gone, my aunt Maria Mandel took over my care.

After the war, my city became part of Czechoslovakia. I felt that I was living in an occupied country. After graduating from high school in 1936 I went to Charles University in Prague to study law. I was still there when the Germans occupied Prague in March 1939. I did not return to Hungary, which now had a Fascist government. Anti-Jewish persecution escalated, quota systems were set in place restricting the number of Jewish students, and Jewish professionals were severely limited in their practices. We now would have to be careful what we said and to whom we spoke; freedom of speech had disappeared.

I heard that it was possible to go to England. I needed a passport, but I was told it would be hard to get since I was a Hungarian living in Czechoslovakia. When I went to the passport office I discovered, to my surprise, the chief of the passport office, Mr. Herr, was my uncle's patient. He recognized me and got me my passport the same day.

The next day, April 3, 1939, I went to the train station and bought a ticket to London. Via Berlin, I caught a train to Holland where I and many other refuges boarded a channel steamer, landing in Harwich, England, the next morning. An English refugee committee welcomed us warmly. I was sent to York where I was placed with an English family to learn the language. In September 1939, when the war started, I was sent to a village near Oxford to learn farming. I milked cows, drove a tractor and dug drainage ditches. After Italian prisoners of war came from the African front I was responsible for driving them to and from the work fields.

In 1944 I was permitted to join the British Army. I was trained as an x-ray technician and was sent to southern India, near Madras, where I took x-rays of injured British and Indian military personnel. While in India I met my first wife Emily and we were married in 1946. I also learned the fate of my family back in Czechoslovakia. All of my immediate family perished except for my sister Elizabeth and my cousin Magda.

In 1946 I returned with Emily to Britain, became a British citizen and in 1948 we came to America. We spent six years in New York, where I was office manager of an import firm. We came to Los Angeles, California, where I started an import business, and later bought

the store of one of my customers. We did well and in 1970 we settled in Santa Barbara with our daughters, Sheri and Tia. I became a real estate broker. Emily and I separated in 1977. I had the great fortune of meeting Evelyn, my second wife, in 1980. Presently I volunteer as an usher at all the classical music venues in Santa Barbara and in the information booth and the Courthouse.

By finding my way to England, I had the good fortune to escape the worst of the tragic events of the time.

Edith Tanner Ostern

(autobiographical narrative)

It was immediately after the Kristallnacht in Vienna, in 1938, that Jewish men were rounded up by the Gestapo and taken away. My father, Emil Tennenbaum was thirty-five years old, my mother, Dora, 25. My brother, George, was only an infant and I was two. Dad was taken to Dachau Concentration Camp.

A short time thereafter, our apartment was bolted shut by a Nazi Authority. Being without food, drink, clothes or diapers for her babies, my mother ran across Vienna with us in the baby carriage to my Aunt Mira's house where we remained.

Before the start of WWII, the Nazi Regime's goal was simply "Judenrein" (the cleansing of Jews from the country), so my father was let out of Dachau after a month and a half by signing a pledge to leave Austria immediately. With a forged passport claiming that he was a Dutch Protestant, he made his way to a hiding place in Antwerp.

American cousins singed affidavits, our family had obtained visas under the U.S.'s 100,000 quota and many mini-dramas, paper hassles and hardships ensued. My mother fled to Italy with my brother and me. We arrived in Venice, disoriented, unable to communicate in Italian, without lodging and with just a few lira given to my mother by a kindly Italian man who took pity on this 26-year-old refugee with two babies.

We left to the United States from Genoa on the Italian liner, "Rex," arriving November 9, 1939…three days short of my third birthday. Once in New York, George and I were put into a children's shelter—since my mother had no job or language skills. This separation from my parents and my little brother was the most wrenching experience and I remember it as if it has happened last year. My father was reunited with us a year later. We were a somewhat scarred family, but lucky to have left Europe just in time to avoid being caught up in the Holocaust.

The most important time to me, growing up in Boston and New York, was my education at the High School of Music and Art. I also became part of a small group of student activists at the University of Alabama in 1956, working to desegregate the school in the earliest days of the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1957, I taught art in the elementary schools in New Brunswick, New Jersey; my three children, Dan, Shari and Alissa were born there. In 1975 I married Dr. Stanley Ostern. We now share six grandchildren.

Stan "Szymon" Ostern

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in 1935 in Stryj, Poland (now the Ukraine). The town had a population of 32,000, of which 12,000 were Jews. As I was only four years old when the war broke out, I have no memory of many of my family members; I know that they were killed in the Holocaust.

I was brought up in an affluent home. My mother went to law school in Lwow. My father completed medical school in Padua, Italy, graduated in 1929, and practiced in Stryj until he was conscripted in to the Russian Army in 1941. He survived the war as an army doctor in Kazakhstan. In July 1941, the German Army reoccupied Stryj and the town's entire Jewish population was put into a ghetto. I was in this ghetto for close to one year and somehow managed to avoid the "actions"—deportations to the shooting fields. As an act of great foresight, a few Jews in the town, fearing the return of the German troops, had prepared a bunker. The bunker was built under an existing house. A Pole named Kazik Starko was hired to live in the house and provide food in exchange for payments of gold. The builder of the bunker, a man named Morgenstern, managed to tap into the city gas line which provided fuel for cooking and light. Water was obtained through a hand pump tapped into a main water pipe. Two vents extended into the attic which served as a conduit for food and an air supply. When the Germans occupied Stryj, 35 Jews, including my family and 6 children under 15, managed to get into this bunker built for 12. In escaping out of the ghetto and en route to the bunker, my family was offered shelter by an SS officer who permitted us to stay in his office overnight. The bunker was sealed and we did not em erge until August 1944 when the Russian Army drove the German Army out of Stryj.

In the bunker we just existed. We were constantly hungry due to meager food supplies. The rats appeared better fed than I was, and they were able to see daylight and breathe fresh air where I couldn't. I was trapped in this hole in the ground…without anything to read, without children's games to play. We were in constant fear of being found by the Germans. We slept in the day and moved around at night to avoid being heard by neighbors. By the time we entered the bunker, we already knew that Jews were being shot en masse, and then later, Starko informed us that he had heard that Jews were being sent to camps where they were murdered. Rumor had it that my grandparents were sent to one of these death camps named Belzec.

One day a neighbor by the name of Roman Kalinowski heard noises and went to Kazik Starko and told him that he knew he was hiding Jews in a bunker under the house. Starko assumed that Kalinowski would denounce him to the Germans which would mean a certain

death for us and Starko. Instead, he volunteered to provide us with as much food as he could obtain and did not want any payment for this. Roman was truly a righteous man.

Our family was reunited in Poland after the war. At the time I was liberated, I had no education, although my mother tried to educate me, but without books or writing materials this was very difficult. I was basically illiterate, and spoke no English when I came to the U.S. in 1946. I attended high school in the Lower East Side of New York, received my B.A. from New York University in 1956, and graduated from New York Medical College in 1960. I completed a residency in Internal Medicine at the Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn. I served in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Air Force in California. I started my medical practice in Santa Barbara in 1966 and retired in 1999.

I, as a hidden child, lost something precious—my youth. But, still, I was fortunate to survive. Over one million Jewish children died during the holocaust, and countless other children died during World War II. Let us pray that future children will be spared.

Bernhard Penner

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born on November 29, 1926 in Unna, a small town in western Germany where perhaps 150 Jews lived. My parents, Regina and Chaim, were both of Orthodox Jewish Polish origin. I was raised in a moderately prosperous home. My father was a merchant who dealt in leather, hides and fur.

Preschool and the first two years of public school were a pleasant experience. Around 1934 a gradual change occurred. Since I was one of only four Jewish children in a school of 600 or more boys, I experienced a progressive sense of isolation and alienation. My new teacher, who proudly wore his Nazi party emblem, singled me out for verbal and physical abuse; on more than one occasion, he told me to go back to where I belonged, Palestine. My erstwhile friends taunted me with anti-Semitic remarks. Many days I fought my way to and from school. Siegfried, who had been my best friend, joined the Hitler Youth and spurned my company, eventually even joining my tormentors on the street. My home and our synagogue became my only havens from hostility. More and more I became a young street fighter, using anything at hand to protect myself.

In 1936, my older brother, Salomon, went to the U.S. under the aegis of relatives with whom he later lived. My parents managed to sign me up for immigration to the U.S., and in early 1938, I arrived here with one of the few American-Jewish sponsored children's transports. The Jewish Social Service of Albany, New York found a foster home for me with a poor Jewish family, who were paid $8 per week for my room and board. They needed this money but resented me and all the refugees who were coming from Europe and taking away their jobs, and my home situation was extremely unhappy.

In October 1938, the remainder of my immediate family along with all the other remaining Polish Jews in Germany were forced by the Nazi government to leave the country and were ghettoized in Zbaszyn, a no-man's-land between Germany and Poland. During the summer of 1939, my older sister, Hannah, managed to go to London as an au pair. My parents and younger brother, Herbert, were finally permitted by the Poles to go to Rymanow to join relatives there. Shortly thereafter, World War II started. My parents and brother were trapped in the German occupied zone of Poland, and perished in the Plaszow or Belzec camps in the summer of 1942.

I left Albany to study at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. By working several jobs, I managed to eke out a meager sustenance while finishing a year of college. I was really and truly living hand to mouth. I was keen to enter the U.S. Army because of a desire to find my loved ones in Europe and to punish the Germans. As an "enemy" alien, I could

not volunteer for duty. In January of 1945, however, I was drafted into the army; I ended up in the Philippines and then Japan. Two years later, with all the benefits of the GI Bill, I returned to the University of Wisconsin and then went on to medical school.

In 1995 I retired from my practice as a General Surgeon, moved to Santa Barbara, and have since found much joy in living among and tending to my trees, admiring my magnificent rocks, and sculpting. I have been incredibly fortunate with the love of a truly remarkable wife, Beverly, three terrific children, and many long-standing friends. My abiding love for Judaism is an ever present source of strength. I shall always be grateful to the United HIAS Service for saving my life by enabling me to leave Germany. Despite the fact that America might have saved many more of my people from the Holocaust, I also feel intense appreciation for my country. I am constantly grateful to Israel and its valiant people for the pride I feel in its accomplishments, and the sense of security we Jews have that there will always be at least one country where we are welcome.

Gela Baser Percal

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Rakow, Poland, into a close and loving family. I had two brothers and two sisters. Our lives changed completely when the Nazis entered Poland in September 1939. How terrible our lives would become, we couldn't imagine. In September 1942, the Jews of Rakow were ordered by the Nazis to leave everything and be ready for deportation in one hour. We were told we were going to labor camps and were promised large food rations and better living conditions. My parents, distrusting this, decided we would all go into hiding in the forest. We slept on the damp cold ground. Freezing cold and hunger were our constant companions. My family eventually found shelter in a Polish farmer's stable. He brought some food when he fed the cows. We had a small dark corner with some clean straw, and that is how we spent the winter. In the spring we went back to the forest where we joined a group of about 30 other Jews who were also hiding in the forest. The Nazis and Polish collaborators hounded us; we always escaped.

On May 5, 1943, my younger sister Rachel and I went to buy some food from the farmer who hid us. Before we left the farmer's house, one of his sons came looking for us. We hid in a small potato cellar in the house and overheard him tell the story of how he and a group of Poles caught my family and the others hidden in the forest and shot them all. I knew these killers would come looking for us, but there was no place in Poland my sister and I could hide.

When time ran out to hide in Poland, I devised a plan to go to Germany with a false birth certificate, pretending to be a Catholic Pole. After escaping from the farmer's house, I made my way to the city's registrar's office where an official bravely agreed to provide me with false identification. Then I walked for two days to reach Kielce, where they sent transports of Poles to Germany as slave laborers. I walked into the German Arbietsamt and so as not to make them suspicious, I made up a story that I was running away from home to be with my boyfriend, who was in Germany because my parents objected to him. The Germans at the border bought my story and took me as a Polish slave laborer. My journey to Germany was terrifying. I lived in fear every moment of being recognized—by the Nazis or the Poles.

I ended up in Germany with a family of Nazis, where I did household work, and carried very heavy milk cans to and from their dairy store. In their house was a huge portrait of Hitler posed with their son, a high ranking SS officer, and son-in-law. I felt I was in the lion's jaw but I couldn't show it. Later, I ended up in another household with a butcher shop, where I worked like a slave, in constant fear of making a mistake and being recognized. This fear was particularly acute as the family often invited Nazi officials to dinner and I had to serve them.

When a German who lived through that time tells the world that they didn't know what their government was doing to the Jews, and others they deemed undesirable, don't believe it. I was there and lived among them and heard what they knew. In one of the homes where I worked, the son saw the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto and the uprising. The Germans knew what became of their Jewish neighbors. Some sons and husbands worked in concentration and death camps. It was their indifference to our suffering that made it possible.

The Americans liberated me in the spring of 1945. They assembled us and gave us each an orange. It was the sweetest orange I will ever eat. I wanted to get out of Germany as soon as I could, off that soil cursed with our blood and consumed with hatred. I decided not to let myself hate in return or I would become as low as they. Hate is destructive and blinding. Rather than hate, we must be vigilant to what is happening to our neighbors and minorities and how our government is protecting all its people.

With a little help I ended up in Belgium a few months after liberation. That was where I went hoping to find some Jewish people. There I met my husband Fred who was in the U.S. Army. We married in Brussels on November 28, 1945. We have been married for 57 years. He is still my best friend. We have two daughters and two grandchildren.

Fred W. Perutz

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Vienna, Austria on May 22, 1919. For two generations my family operated a raw cotton import business. Early life in my upper middle-class Jewish family was uneventful. My first realization of Austrian anti-Semitism came when I had to join a separate Jewish Boy Scout troop. About one third of the 30 students in our high school class never spoke one word to their eight Jewish classmates.

During the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938, I witnessed the swift well-organized takeover of the inner city of Vienna by brown-shirted Austrian Nazis, followed by a triumphant torch-lit parade with swastikas, flags hanging from every window, drumbeats and jubilant crowds. I watched the destruction of Jewish stores and the humiliation of Jewish men and women on the streets of Vienna.

The family decided that we had to flee as quickly as possible. A relative in New York generously sent us affidavits, facilitating our entry to the U.S. I left Vienna by train with a forged Greek passport. The train was stopped by the Gestapo and I was interrogated. By insisting that I only spoke French, not German, the officials decided to look for other victims; this was probably the most frightening experience of my life. After the rest of my family left Vienna, a Wehrmacht General took over my house.

I arrived in the U.S. on April 28, 1938. I spent most of the next years in Waco, Texas, as an apprentice in the cotton business. In 1943, I volunteered for U.S. Army service and after induction was rejected because I was not a U.S. citizen. A few months later, however, I was drafted. I was first sent to a special "Austrian Battalion," which the state department created to help instate a postwar military presence. After that unit was disbanded, I served in a Military Intelligence camp, learning to interrogate German prisoners of war. Subsequently, I was transferred to a special Psychological Warfare Branch and spent the rest of the war in Luxembourg. Our unit took over the radio station and its powerful transmitter which broadcast almost continuously in German to damage both military and civilian morale. We also created leaflets for the same purpose, which were dropped by planes. At the end of the war, I returned to Vienna, repossessed our ransacked home, as well as that of my Uncle Hans, who later turned it over to Israel as its first Austrian Embassy.

My wife Margaret and I were married on a two-day pass from the army in 1943. She was also born in Vienna and is an artist. We celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary in 2003. We have two children, Anthony and Andrea, and three grandchildren.

My mother, Alice Broch, was co-founder of the Window Shop, a well known non-

profit bakery/restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is still in operation today. After being discharged as a Tech-Sergeant, I rejoined the New York commodities firm founded by E.J. Schwabach, the relative who had generously sent us our affidavits.

My father, brother George and I specialized in the world-wide trading of raw cotton bales. I became a director of the New York Cotton Exchange and President of the Importers Association. We moved to Santa Barbara in 1986 and I retired ten years later. We are forever grateful to have escaped, together with our immediate families, from Nazi occupied Austria and to have had the great opportunity for a new life in the United States.

Martha Prince

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Vienna, Austria, July 29, 1913. My parents, Marie and Georg Schwarz, owned a secondhand shop in Vienna. My two brothers and I had a traditional Jewish upbringing; I went to Hebrew school.

I was studying orthopedics at the University of Vienna for two years when, in March 1939, Hitler invaded Austria. Jews were not allowed to continue their studies at university. My family was forced to close their shop due to anti-Jewish measures. On November 9, 1938, Kristallnacht, my two brothers were picked up from our house and sent to Dachau, the first concentration camp for Jews. Fortunately, my brothers came out of the concentration camp unharmed in April, 1939. My family soon made the decision to leave Austria, and luckily we had enough savings. We were also very fortunate that my father had a brother who had moved to New York in the early 1900s. He sent us the necessary affidavits for us to leave Austria. My two brothers and I arrived in New York in May 1939. We were able to bring our parents to New York on the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, the last ship that sailed from Holland in February 1940.

On the boat coming to America I met my future husband Robert, who was also born and raised in Vienna, We lost each other as we went our separate ways after arriving in New York, me with my family and he with his. Imagine our surprise when we literally bumped into each other in December 1939 on Broadway in New York. We talked about our experiences and what we were doing during that time, started dating and the old flame was rekindled. About one year after arriving in New York we were married. During World War II Robert was drafted into the army, serving in the military police.

Upon his release, we started our family of two sons, Roy and Steven. My husband Robert and I moved to Los Angeles where we opened in electrolysis studio. Once widowed I continued to work as an electrologist. After I retired I became active with volunteer work. I worked at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles and as a fitness instructor at the Jewish Community Center, teaching aerobics to seniors. Since moving to Santa Barbara in 2003, I have continued to teach aerobics to seniors.

Clara Reitman

(autobiographical narrative)

Our mother, Clara, was born October 2, 1919 in Komarno, Czechoslovakia. The family Raab, who were patriotic Hungarians, had lived in this town for generations, which prior to the First World War was named Komarom and belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The family ran a textile business in the town centre.

On Mother's Day, 1937, Clara, 16 years old, met 21 year old Leslie Reitman; they courted and planned to marry in the fall of 1938, but then fate intervened. Following the German annexation of Austria in March of that year, Leslie was called to serve in the Czech Army. Clara and Leslie were separated. On March 14, 1939, some months after the Munich Agreement and the German takeover of the Sudetenland, Komarno became part of an independent Slovakia - essentially a German satellite. This was the first time Clara ever felt persecuted for being Jewish; anti-Jewish violence erupted that night. Clara's father was attacked with a club in front of their house.

The situation in Komarno became even worse when the German Army occupied Hungary in March 1944. Clara's brothers Alex and Ernest were summoned to work camps. Her sister Edith had, fortunately, already left for Palestine. Hearing that whoever worked in the fields would be saved from deportation, Clara, her parents and her sisters Lily and Olga (with Olga's infant son, Tommy) rented land from a farmer. The farmer waited just until the field was ready for harvest before reporting them to the authorities. The family was taken to a ghetto, and from there, deported to Auschwitz in June 1944.

After the selection at Auschwitz, Clara and Lily were sent to Taha, a work camp nearby. Their single goal was to stay alive for each other. Clara recalled during an interview taped in the 1970s: "With your shaved head, and no shoes, you had to carry big stones up the hill. And the Germans were standing over you, the sun, I still feel it on my head, no shade in the middle of the hot summer, and no drink and no stopping. It was terrible. I don't know how we were able to do that." Clara and Lily were then sent back to Auschwitz and went through selection a second time. After a narrow escape from death in the gas chambers, Clara and Lily were sent to a munitions factory near Leipzig. Of that time she said: "We worked underground and we worked very hard, but compared to the other life (back in Auschwitz), this was heaven. We had clothes on. And we got some warm food twice a day; the minimum. We were still very hungry and very tired."

Suddenly the whole area was evacuated. Clara and Lily were marched out by the German SS with just the clothes on their backs. She recalled: "It was winter and snowing, no shelter over our heads. Sometimes we were marched 50 kilometers without stopping. We slept on the snow under the trees. Many were shot who couldn't go on, or died along

the way. We'd been walking like this for three or four weeks. I said that's it. I can't walk. I fell and I was waiting for when the SS man would shoot me. Lily just fell beside me because she didn't want to leave me like this. And I remember when the German went by and stood like that (and looked at us). That's how my life (hung by a thread). He just gestured with his hand. He was too tired to shoot me, I guess."

Clara and Lily survived and returned to Komarno on May 27, 1945, to find their brothers, Alex and Ernie, and Clara's fiancée, Leslie, had survived.

Clara and Leslie were married in Zlate Morace, Czechoslovakia, after eight years of waiting.

Leslie Reitman

(autobiographical narrative)

Our father, Leslie, was born in 1914 in the village of Slapcany, near Bratislava, in Czechoslovakia. His father, Gustav, prospered as a grain dealer. Leslie was three years old when he first saw his father. Gustav was away, serving in World War I. His mother Cecelia, a very religious woman, ran the household in his absence raising four boys, and taking care of the family business. At fifteen, Leslie was put to work in the grain business, while also attending school. 1937 was a decisive year in his life. He began mandatory service in the Czech Army. His mother died. One month later, while stationed in Komarno, Czechoslovakia, he first saw Clara Raab. They met on May 6, when Clara was 16. Leslie soon won her heart.

With his business experience and ability in mathematics, Leslie soon became the accountant for his infantry. He was transferred to a military building department that happened to be on the same street where Clara lived; they saw each other often. When the German Army marched into Austria, in March 1938, he was called back to his company to serve in the field; Leslie and Clara were separated.

In March 1939, following the annexation of Czechoslovakia, Slapcany came under Slovakian control; the family grain business was confiscated by the State but the family was retained to operate the business. At the outbreak of World War II, Leslie was called to serve in the Czech Military, now promoted to regimental accountant. Following his dismissal in 1940, he returned home to work in the family business. He was temporarily protected from deportation because he was considered 'economically important.' However, on March 29, 1942, an order came for one child to report to the authorities from each Jewish family; Leslie decided he would go. He was loaded onto a cattle car with 1,500 other men and women and taken to a concentration camp in Novacky, Slovakia. Leslie recalled this experience during an interview taped in the 1970s: "It's hard to describe the things that were happening there - how they were beating people, how they behaved... They had whips and beat us... Next morning, they took everything from us except the clothes we were wearing. And they put us in lines. By the time it was late afternoon we knew we were going away... they were going to transfer us to Poland." Suddenly a group of police arrived led by his close childhood friend, Shanya Urban, a non-Jew. He saved Leslie from that transport, which, Leslie found out later, was headed to Auschwitz. To the best of his knowledge, no-one from that transport of 1,500 came back after the war.

Leslie went into hiding. Using his political connections, he slipped over the Slovakian border into Hungary where Jews were not yet being deported to concentration camps. Using false papers, Leslie, who was now with his father and brother, hid in Budapest. One

day, Leslie was picked up in a random police check. He was sent to a detention camp in Budapest where he was informed by Polish prisoners that to stay meant certain death. He cleverly escaped with the assistance of his brother and made his way by train to Komarno, to Clara. Outside Komarno, Leslie worked in the fields for a Bulgarian family, who acquired false papers for him. After some time, Leslie began to work for the underground, bringing food to Jews in hiding. When members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross came to the Bulgarian family's house demanding Leslie's papers and asked: "Where is the Jew?" Leslie knew someone had betrayed him. He made a quick escape through a window, eventually finding his way to the next village. He hid in bales of straw in a friend's barn from January 19 to March 27, 1945 when the Russian Army freed him. After liberation, Leslie went back to Komarno to wait for Clara. She had survived. They were soon married.

Together Leslie and Clara built new lives. In 1946, Ivan was born. Leslie had established a vinegar factory in Komarno, but on February 25, 1948, the Czech Communists took power and the factory was put under their control. After Leslie was threatened with imprisonment if production quotas at the factory were not met, Clara, Leslie and Ivan were forced to make a perilous escape from Czechoslovakia. They spent five days in the darkened hold of a coal barge, smuggled from Komarno to Vienna along the Danube River. They risked everything to reach freedom. They started over for a third time in 1951 when they immigrated to Toronto, Canada. Twin daughters Agi and Susan were born in 1953. Life in Canada was a struggle at first. They worked in factories and from their modest incomes, saved enough to open a dry-cleaning store and later invested in real estate. Leslie passed away in March 1993. He was 78. Clara passed away in February 2000 at the age of 80.

Clara and Leslie were deeply grateful to Canada for taking them in as refugees and for the freedom and opportunity Canada offered. A property they purchased in the 1970s will house the new headquarters of the Toronto International Film Festival, serving on their behalf as thanks to the Canadian people.

Lisa Rozsa

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born August 27, 1917 in Brno, Czechoslovakia, the eldest daughter of Jacques and Selma Liebschütz (née Bogad). My family owned and operated a successful moving and storage company. I had a very happy childhood in a big family. My parents and younger sister, and my whole extended family were deported to the Terezin ghetto in 1942, where my father died of the flu. My sister Gerda and my mother were deported on separate transports to Auschwitz. My sister died in Auschwitz. My mother managed to survived Auschwitz, a death march, and then being imprisoned at Terezin Fortress as a political prisoner.

I never encountered any anti-Semitism when I was growing up, none at all. I never saw myself as any different from the other children at school. I started studying arts at the university in Brno in 1937 but once the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, because of the German decree against Jews studying at university, I was no longer able to attend.

I was fortunate that on the very day the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia, I received a visa to go to Baghdad. The man I would marry, Imre Rozsa, had secured this visa for me. The fact that Imre did that at that very moment certainly saved my life because I had somewhere to go after leaving Czechoslovakia.

Imre was a Hungarian-born architect working in Baghdad. We had met in Brno while we were both studying. Three days after I arrived in Baghdad, we married; we lived there for two years, and then moved to Basra, where I worked for the Red Cross commissioner. We left Iraq in 1942 via Palestine and landed in Mombasa, Kenya, spent some time in Entebbe, Uganda, until my husband joined the British Army and was posted to Nairobi, Kenya. My mother joined us, and we lived there for the next 40 years. Our three children were born there. Imre and I were active members of the Jewish Community. Imre designed the synagogue of the Nairobi Hebrew Congregation and eventually became the head of the Jewish congregation. I became the chairperson of Kenya's WIZO, a Jewish organization which supports health, social welfare and educational programs in Israel. I also organized the Flying Doctors' Children's Service which brought urgent medical services to African children who lived in remote areas.

We left Kenya in 1978 in order to join our two daughters in California where we made a new home in Ojai. When my husband passed away 12 years later, our daughters and family moved to Santa Barbara. I am so fortunate to spend my sunset years with my children, grandchildren and one great-grandson. Mine was a very exciting and varied life with all its ups and downs on four continents.

Sam Rusinek

(autobiographical narrative)

Szymon Rusinek, also known as "Sam the Tailor," was born in Poland on October 10, 1917, the eldest of five siblings. As a child, Sam apprenticed with his father and learned the skills of a tailor. At 19, Sam ran away from home when his landlady threatened to turn him over to the Nazis because he was a Jew. That was the last time he saw his whole family alive. His sister Tova (now deceased), was the only surviving member of his immediate family.

Sam was arrested for crossing the border from Poland to Russia, along with hundreds of others. He was sent to Siberia, where he struggled to survive in prison for two years in brutally freezing weather. Because he arranged with the prison's warden to allow him to use potato sacks to make mittens, coats, and pants for the prisoners, Sam soon became known as "the tailor." He saved many lives by providing warm clothing to young men trying to survive in temperatures below zero. After his release from prison he decided to join the newly established Polish brigade, also known as the Kosciuszko Division. He later became a high-ranking officer in the Armia Krajowa, the Polish Home Army, the main anti-Nazi resistance organization. During the time Sam served in the Polish Army, from 1942 until the end of World War II, he had to hide the fact that he was Jewish.

After the war, while Sam was stationed at a border town between Germany and Poland, he met a childhood friend, Bronislawa, also known as Laura. She was also a Holocaust survivor. They rekindled their friendship and soon married. Their first daughter Phyliss was born in Germany. Shortly after, they returned to Poland in the hopes of finding surviving relatives. Unfortunately, no one was found, as they were all killed in the Holocaust. Helena, their second daughter, was born in Poland.

Sam started a manufacturing company where he designed and produced fur coats. At this time, Poland was under Communist rule, making it difficult for anyone to own an independent business. Anti-Semitism was still prevalent there and Sam and Laura did not feel welcome. In 1957, when the Polish government offered the opportunity for the remaining Jews to leave the country, Sam and his family immigrated to Israel. There Sam designed and manufactured swimwear. In 1960, his extended American family invited Sam to join them in New York.

After his divorce from Bronislawa, Sam married Ida Ponce and moved to beautiful Santa Barbara, where Roland, their son, was born. Sam lived in his beloved Santa Barbara for 42 years, and was the proud owner of a tailor shop in the Carrillo Hotel for 27 years. He loved his work and passionately served his clients.

Sam ‘Szymon’ Rusinek died on October 19, 2002 in Santa Barbara. His wish was to return to Israel and his dream came true. He is buried in Jerusalem. A life that so lived and loved, a family so proud of his heroism and courage - in loving memory, I, Phyliss, am proud to present a synopsis of a life, of a man, who was our father and grandfather.

Laura Rusk

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in 1922 and raised by my Uncle Adam and Aunt Helena Ostrowski in Katowice, Poland. Most of the Jewish population where I lived was poor, but I was fortunate to grow up in real comfort. At 17, I was making plans to continue my education when Hitler invaded Poland. The suffering of the Jewish people began; each month our predicament intensified. The Germans forced us to wear a yellow Star of David. We were not allowed to walk through certain areas of the city, and after a certain hour were prohibited from being out in the streets. It was a struggle just to eat enough to survive. There were random beatings and killings of Jews. By 1940, we were living in constant fear of being dragged off to be sent away to a labor or concentration camp.

One day, in 1942, all the Jews in the town were ordered to come to a football stadium. I watched as thousands of people were selected for deportation by train to Auschwitz. This day was the last time I saw my mother, grandmothers, grandfathers, sisters, uncles and aunts.

I was spared because I had been cutting wood for the German Army and had work papers. A few months later I was sent to Landeshut, a labor camp in Germany. There I worked making thread from flax. In 1943 I was transferred to another camp, Peterswaldau, in Lower Silesia, where I was a slave laborer at a munitions factory, assembling fuses for bombs. We were treated worse than animals; we were always exhausted and hungry and heavily punished for the slightest infraction. I promised myself that I would put an end to this suffering - I made a plan to escape. One Sunday, a Czech prisoner and I ran through the barbed wire - it was a miracle that the SS patrol guards didn't see us. After scrambling over a brick wall, we were free. We made our way to a cargo train station and hid inside an empty wagon. We went from train to train, from town to town. Hoping for anonymity in a bigger city we made our way to Neisse. But the town was swarming with SS and Gestapo. We separated hoping that would throw off police searching for a pair of women escapees. I tried to pass myself off as a Pole to a group of Polish laborers whom I met by chance, but a collaborator turned me in. The chief of the Gestapo in the area interrogated me, and then sent me to jail. One month later, I was given a choice between deportation to Peterswaldau or going to Auschwitz. I chose Auschwitz, knowing that torture and hanging were the final destiny for anyone who tried to escape from Peterswaldau.

I was loaded onto a train wagon with many other prisoners. After what seemed like an endless journey, we arrived at Auschwitz. The train doors opened and we got out. We marched to Birkenau - the main camp where Jewish prisoners were sent and killed in the gas chambers. I thought I was in hell. I was taken to a barrack, given a striped dress and

my hair was cut short. I lost my identity and became prisoner 79564. This number was tattooed on my left arm.

I was assigned to work in the fields clearing away heavy stones. The SS and their dogs constantly guarded us. We worked all day long and without food or rest. Then, returning to the camp, we had to face endless roll-calls. By chance, I was fortunate to get a secretarial job in an administrative office of the camp making name and date lists of camp prisoners sent to Germany. During November 1944, I was sent from Birkenau to two other camps in Germany. In the spring of 1945, while working in a munitions factory, one morning the SS disappeared. The Russian Army soon arrived with greetings and food. For the first time in many years, I was free; it was wonderful to feel human again.

In great pain I found out that out of an extended family of 40 aunts, uncles and cousins, the only survivors were my brother and me. It was not easy to resume a normal life. I immigrated to the U.S. where I devoted myself to assisting Holocaust survivors with applications for reparations from the German government. I have two daughters and five wonderful grandchildren.

After all my tragic experiences, I can only say today, that I do not feel any hatred. God has shown me mercy. Somehow in the worst moments of my life, I feel protected, as though God was smiling and telling me, “It’s not your time to die.” I thank God for every day that is added to my life.

George Rusznak

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in May 1938 in Budapest, Hungary. I have a sister five years older than me. My parents owned a small grocery store, worked very hard and lived a middle-class life.

During World War II, Hungary was an ally of Nazi Germany and assisted in the persecution of Jews. In 1943 my father was conscripted into a Jewish work battalion. This was a special unit which was brutally exploited for hard labor, supporting the regular army. My mother later learned that he was killed by the Nazis. She didn't tell us until after the war. I have only a few vague memories of him.

In 1944, the persecution of the Jews intensified. The Jews of Budapest were forced into a ghetto, a walled-off part of the city. This is where my mother, sister and I ended up. We had to wear yellow stars and our movements were severely restricted. My mother took many risks by removing the star and leaving the ghetto to secure medicine and food for us. Twice, on these occasions, she was captured and sent to a staging area to be sent to the concentration camps. But each time, knowing that her children's lives depended on her, she summoned extraordinary strength and great resourcefulness to successfully escape and come back to take care of us.

Large-scale deportations to the concentration camps began in May 1944. Over a period of only a few months more than 600,000 Hungarian Jews were deported and killed. At times, when there were no trains available, people were taken to the banks of the river and machine-gunned. In December 1944, the residents of our building were also assembled for deportation. But my mother still wouldn't give up. Desperately, she approached an armed guard and pleaded with him to let us get away. By some miracle he agreed and we slipped into a storage area. After the transport left, we were helped by several kind and brave Christians to find refuge outside the city. For the rest of the war we were hiding with a kind family in a one-room house with a dirt floor. We shared this small space with our protectors, their nine children and eleven dogs.

From our extended family only a few survived. Both sets of my grandparents, ten of my aunts and uncles and fourteen of my cousins were killed. I have no memories of them.

My mother couldn't take care of us after the war. She had to put me in an orphanage for a while. I was nine years old and terribly homesick there. We didn't have enough to eat, and during the winter I was always cold. The discipline was severe. I was truly miserable.

I rejoined my mother after one year. In October of 1956 there was an uprising against the Communist government of Hungary and an opportunity to escape arose. My mother, selflessly, without knowing if we would ever see each other again, encouraged me to leave for a better life in the free world. I escaped to Austria where I spent some time in several refugee camps. There I met Julie, a fellow refugee. We got married and came to the U.S. in September 1957. With $10 in our pocket and ten English words in our vocabulary, and with some initial support from Jewish charities, we started to build our lives.

We moved to Los Angeles and in 1959 I became a pioneer in the computer field. I was glad that, as a survivor, through my work I got to be in a position to help bring about the Information Age and contribute to humankind by improving life in a variety of different ways.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have survived the Holocaust and will be forever grateful to my mother who repeatedly risked her life to save us and to the brave and kind Christians without whose help we would have surely been part of the six million who perished.

Julie Rusznak

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in July 1940 in Budapest, Hungary. My father, Vilmos, was a clerk. My mother, Margarit, was apprenticing to be a seamstress. We lived with my grandparents.

Thirty members of my immediate family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) died in the Holocaust.

Shortly after the war broke out, my father and his cousin were taken to a labor camp named Bor, and then to Buchenwald, where they died in 1944. I have no recollection of my father.

My mother was also deported, but when the train stopped at the Hungarian border, she bribed a guard with her gold wedding band, and he let her go. Somehow, she made it back to Budapest, where I was staying with my aunt.

After she came back to me, she decided that we would hide our Jewish identity by pretending to be Catholic Hungarians from the countryside. Being only four years old, I didn't know that I was Jewish and why we were hiding until after the war. My mother found work as a maid with a gypsy violinist and his German wife, both of whom believed her story. This couple regularly entertained German soldiers in their apartment. One day, shortly before the end of the war, a visiting German soldier saw me in the house and told the wife that he thought I was Jewish. My mother overheard this, and the same night she packed our meager belongings and we left.

After the war, my mother was given a tobacco store to run, and I went to school and also studied music until the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. At that time, my mother decided that we should leave Hungary and seek better opportunities for me elsewhere. We just locked up our apartment and left, leaving everything behind.

We were in an Austrian refugee camp waiting for passage to Canada, when I met George. In September 1957 we got married in Vienna and came to the U.S. We lived in Los Angeles where I sold real estate, until we retired and moved to Santa Barbara. We have one son who lives with his wife in the Los Angeles area.

Lili Schiff

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born Liliane Mendrowski in Brussels, Belgium on May 15, 1932. I did not identify myself as Jewish; my family lived as assimilated Belgians.

The Germans invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940. I was afraid, but I didn't ask questions. I knew that horrible things were happening to the Jews. I had to wear a star. My father was a silversmith and the Germans took all his work. An atmosphere of doom pervaded our family.

My parents arranged for my sister and me to live in the country. Our neighbors in Brussels had a grocery store. They said their brother and his wife, who lived in Liège, would take my sister Frida and me; they had just lost their own daughter. But I never knew why I was going away or where I was going. I was told I would have more food to eat and better air out in the country.

In less painful moments, I realize that I was fortunate to have met many kind and caring people, righteous people who saved my life and my sister's life. I will never, never, never forget them. For two years, my sister and I were cherished by a middle-aged Christian couple, Monsieur and Madame Donnay. Monsieur Donnay was a coal miner; they were illiterate and had never left their village. I had never met them or heard their names. Nevertheless, they welcomed us into their home and in their hearts, no questions asked or answered.

Two years later, the Gestapo barged into their home in the middle of the night in search of the Donnay's son, Bernard. He had been denounced as being a member of the underground. He was a trained engineer and had provided the Allies with information about German troop movements in Belgium and of train destinations to the front. My sister and I had to hide elsewhere, with no time for goodbyes. We were put in a truck covered by coals and tree logs, and dropped off at a convent. The truck was driven by another righteous person who saved our lives. His name was Father Bruno Reynders, a Benedictine priest, a formidable man who helped save 390 Jewish children in Belgium alone. He was a hero.

Father Reynders and the Donnays survived the war. My parents survived passing as gentiles; my mother worked as a cook, and my father worked as a janitor at an orphanage. My brother Isy was less fortunate. He was rounded up in Brussels, and deported to Auschwitz, where he was gassed immediately upon arrival. The rest of my mother's and father's families in Belgium and in Poland also died.

After the war, I worked for the Belgian National Broadcasting System as an on-air interviewer. My boss invited me to the U.S. because I spoke English. I was a translator for the United Nations for six years. I met my husband, Edward Schiff, in New York; he was a trial attorney there. We had three children. When Edward became a federal judge we decided to come to California. I received my masters degree in urban sociology from UCLA. I worked in the superior court in Ventura as a family relations mediator. When Edward got a courtroom built in Santa Barbara we moved here in 1973. Since, I have worked for several years for Project Food Chain which prepares home-cooked meals for homebound AIDS patients.

Intellectually, I haven't the dimmest notion of what wars are really about, but I know we must overcome again and again and again for our children's sake and for humanity's sake. Certainly, I was not the only child to have lived through these horrors. At first, I did not want to reveal my story - now my conscience compels me to speak.

Maria Segal

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born as Miriam Polanowicz, in June 1935 in Okuniew Poland, near Warsaw. I was the second youngest child of Lieb and Lyia Polanowicz. I had two brothers and four sisters. I was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home. When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, things got bad for the Jews. All the Jews from Okuniew were deported to the Warsaw ghetto in the spring of 1940. My uncle Itzak invited my whole family to stay with his family in one room on Novoliki Street in the Warsaw ghetto.

While we all worked, we were hungry; a piece of bread was a treat. A Polish woman from Okuniew, Stasia, entered the ghetto and on occasion sold food to the desperate Jews. Stasia was an acquaintance of my family and she was able to smuggle me out of the Ghetto as her own daughter. I returned with Stasia to the ghetto two times to bring food to my family. On my third trip with Stasia, I was unable to enter the ghetto. That was the last time I ever saw my family. I remember clearly my mother saying: "You are the only one who will survive, we will all die."

I stayed with Stasia and her husband, and later lived with her mother and took care of their cows. Several Jews in Okuniew were denounced and killed. After those killings, the Germans came to get me. From that moment, I went into hiding - in field and attics. A friend of mine before the war, Wanda Hadrysiak, sent her mother with a message to meet her at the train station in Warsaw. I traveled in disguise not to be recognized - I never knew who could turn me in. I was in hiding with Wanda and her family in Warsaw. During the Polish uprising in Warsaw, Wanda and I were expelled from the city. While we were fleeing, we were almost executed by a group of Germans. We were saved by Polish doctors who put yellow powder on us. The Germans believed we had jaundice and set us free, which prevented us from going to a concentration camp. We made our way to a farm; we worked in return for food.

Wanda's husband was wounded in the Warsaw Uprising - we joined him in Krakow. In January 1945, we were liberated by the Russian army. We moved to Bydgoszcz in northern Poland. In May 1947, I was chosen to go to Denmark, a trip organized by the Red Cross for orphaned children. I stayed with the Larsen family for several months and they treated me very well.

I found out that my uncle Abraham survived Auschwitz. He was living in Paris and I joined him there. In 1948, I went to Quebec City in Canada. I finished Teacher's College and married in 1958. I have three wonderful children and six grandchildren. I got my master's degree in social work and worked for 23 years in the state of Arizona in Child and Adult Protective Services.

I want to continue to share childhood experiences with others in the hope that my words encourage tolerance and help to prevent another Holocaust from ever happening.

Kurt Singer (z"l)

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Vienna, Austria on August 10, 1911, with the name Kurt Deutsch. When the Nazis came to power, I took my mother's maiden name, Singer. Her family was Bohemian Jews living in Vienna. In 1919, following the German Revolution, my family moved to Berlin.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, my wife Hilde and I started an anti-Nazi underground newspaper which we published in the basement of our bookstore in Berlin. The newspaper reported on the suffering of the first German concentration camp prisoners. The camps at that time were created for the Nazi opposition including political prisoners and the racially unacceptable. In our newspaper, we asked people to send food packages to inmates of the camps, and we had reports from foreign broadcasts. The newspaper was distributed clandestinely through a group of resistance workers who placed papers in Storm Trooper barracks, government buildings, restaurants and sporting events, and wherever the public was assembled. This was a fight of the mosquito against the elephant.

When one of our co-workers was caught and brutally beaten, she gave away our address. I was wanted for high treason - I was considered a traitor to the state, and if caught I would have been executed. I escaped first to Prague, then Vienna, and then via Danzig on a cargo ship to Sweden. Hilde was caught, and received a lenient one year prison sentence due to the fact that she was represented by a high Nazi attorney hired by her family. When she was released, she joined me in Sweden. There, Hilde wrote and published the book 'I was Hitler's Prisoner.'

While in Sweden, I published several books on topics related to the Nazi regime - on the Nazi policy of forced sterilization, on Hitler's Olympics, and the coming air war. I wrote the first biography of Carl von Ossietzky, a Liberal editor of a Democratic magazine called 'Die Weltbuhne' which was strongly anti-Nazi. This book was instrumental in getting Ossietzky, a concentration camp prisoner, the Nobel Peace Prize which was awarded in 1936. In 1940, I wrote a biography of Hermann Göring - the Nazi Air Force chief who ordered the aerial bombardment of England. Göring asked that the book be banned and confiscated, and that I should be extradited to Germany. To avoid extradition, I was able to arrange a visa to the U.S. as a correspondent for a Swedish newspaper. We left from Petsamo, a town in north Finland, on the ship named Matilde Thoren; Hilde and I and our six month old baby arrived safely to Ellis Island in New York.

I lost all contact with my mother and her parents who vanished into the concentration camps. I have no idea how they died. A surviving cousin told me that 66 members of our family were killed by the Nazis.

In the U.S., over 100 books I wrote were published including: Spies and Traitors of World War II, and biographies of Lyndon B. Johnson, Ernest Hemingway, Danny Kaye, Charles Laughton, Albert Schweitzer, and Mata Hari. I wrote a memoir entitled: I Spied and Survived. I did intelligence work during World War II for the U.S., Britain and Norway. As a journalist, some of the highlights of my career were my interviews with Albert Einstein and Leon Trotsky. I currently write for Aufbau, a German-Jewish cultural newspaper, and contribute to a weekly journal Ossietzky.

During the last ten years of my life I have lived as an amputee; I am still active at 92 years. Never give up. Never forget that there were considerable numbers of Jewish groups that were part of the resistance movement against the Nazis whose members were beheaded. They were brave people.

Margaret Singer

(autobiographical narrative)

Until the Nazis came, living in Frankfurt, Germany, we had a fairly pleasant childhood. My parents, though not having any money, sent me and my sister and brothers to a good school. We went hiking with friends, attended synagogue not far from where we lived and walked fearlessly all over the city. Our father, Leon Singer, had lost his business and like most others in Germany couldn't find work. But he told us stories, mystical tales of his shtetl in Poland, and of World War I, where he was a soldier and was wounded. In spite of hardship, we never felt poor or went hungry, and our mother Gitel prepared simple, wonderful Shabbat and holiday dinners.

With the coming of the Nazis a sense of malaise pervaded our lives. Children threw stones at us, calling us names. Jewish people began to disappear. My parents thought it best to leave Frankfurt; later nearly all the Jews who remained in Frankfurt were deported to concentration camps. My family first fled to Alsace-Lorraine and then to the Saar to live with relatives. My father sent my sister Paula and me to America where we had an uncle and aunt. A week later my brother Sidney followed on to New York.

My mother and youngest brother Henry went with my father's two brothers and their families to Paris. In New York my mother's brother Markus Kolber and my sister tried to arrange an affidavit for my mother to come to America. But, due to government delays and the outbreak of World War II, my mother never made it to America. My youngest brother was fortunate to be on the last children's transport from Portugal to America. Later, the Jews in Paris were imprisoned in Drancy and then transported to Auschwitz - my poor mother, my uncles, aunts and cousins among them. They were close and loving people, but each died separately.

My father and a group of men went secretly on a trail over the Alps to enter Italy. But they were caught and spent the war years in an Italian concentration camp. My father worked as a cook. At the end of the war, my brother Sidney, who was by then with the U.S. army, found my father and helped him come to America.

After arriving in the U.S., I worked in a factory in New York. A friend introduced me to the American People School where I studied art with my teacher Carl Nelson. After moving to Santa Barbara, I worked at different jobs, attended City College and then UCSB, where I received a BA in art and MA in educational psychology. After graduating, I became a teacher at City College Adult Education and taught portrait, figure and landscape painting for 20 years.

Alex Stein

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born on June 23, 1923, in Brno, Czechoslovakia. I came from a well-to-do family who owned several malt factories. We were German-speaking Czechs. We were practicing Jews, but not very religious.

Starting in late 1938, there was a change of attitude. I was resented as a German-speaking Jew by the other students and I transferred to a Czech school. I was attacked by five German kids because I was Jewish. When I fought back and hurt my attackers, the police became involved. The police chief told my parents it was prudent for me to leave the country for reasons of safety; my parents quickly arranged for me to leave for London. Some members of my extended family from Vienna lived there. I insisted that my brother Paul join me. My mother Vilma accompanied us to London. My aunt Lilly offered to arrange for my mother to get a work permit so she could stay in London. However, after two weeks, she felt duty bound to return to her husband and mother in Czechoslovakia.

My parents later decided to leave Czechoslovakia. I attempted to get them out, but unfortunately, it was too late. By the time their visas to Cuba were issued, Pearl Harbor had happened and all travel was stopped. In March 1942, my parents were sent to the Theresienstadt (Terezin) ghetto and from there, on April 14, 1942, they were transported to the Chelmno death camp, where they were gassed. I lost a total of 22 members of my family.

When the war worsened for the Allies, a family decision was made to leave England for Panama, a country that provided visas in exchange for money. Thus, in June 1940, the entire London family, consisting of 14 people and our dog, left for Panama City. The American Jewish community in the Republic of Panama, in particular Rabbi Witkin, were very helpful in enabling my brother and I to stay in Panama permanently. The Rabbi also arranged for us to work as mechanics. Finally, as a result of a direct appeal to U.S. Chief Justice Felix Frankfurter, my brother and I were put at the head of the visa list and left in May 1941 for New York City. We were extremely fortunate because a week after our arrival, all immigration was stopped.

At the time, I was 17, my brother 15, and we were down to $500. I worked as a mechanic while my brother was enrolled at a high school. We agreed that I would be the primary wage earner until he graduated, at which time we would switch; I would finish high school while he worked. In 1943, drafted into the U.S. Navy, I was finally able to continue my studies at a prestigious navy technical school. I was assigned to go to the Pacific. The evening of my departure, I went to visit Aunt Lilly in New York City, where

at the house of another Czech émigré family I met the host's 15-year-old daughter, Doris. Little did we know that four years later we would marry.

Life in the U.S. was good for the Stein family. I became an electronics engineer, working as a consultant for the U.S. Air Force, where my most recent assignment was managing a large space program. Doris and I have three sons and six grandchildren. Several times I have returned to my place of birth, and visited the graveyard of my forefathers to say Kaddish. These trips make me sad, but I thank the good Lord to be living in the USA.

Dora Tanner

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Bobrka, Poland on May 15, 1913. This area, which is now the Ukraine, was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My parents were Elias Austein and Sarah Langenauer-Leiter of Lemberg (Lvov). When I was one year old, my home and those of other village Jews were burned by Russians during a pogrom and we fled to Vienna. Economic times were difficult during that period and families made great sacrifices. My early childhood was difficult.

I was schooled in Vienna to the level of "gymnasium" graduate which equals junior college in the U.S. In 1934, I met and married Emil Tennenbaum. My husband had established a plywood business and our life was comfortable. In 1936, Edith was born. By the time my son George was born in 1938, the political climate for Jews in Vienna had taken an ominous turn. I remember seeing elderly Jewish men being humiliated by Nazis, forced to scrub sidewalks with small brushes. Emil was caught in a round-up after Kristallnacht and taken to Dachau concentration camp. While hundreds of prisoners perished, at this early time prisoners were being released if they could prove that they were investigating avenues of immigration. It is still hard for me to imagine myself at the age of 25, with two babies, going to Gestapo to arrange for a release; then obtaining a forged passport for my husband to flee Antwerp; traveling to Italy with my two children; and finally taking an ocean liner to New York.

Emil joined us in New York in 1940, after hiding in Antwerp for several months. He Anglicized our family to the name "Tanner". We moved to Boston for three years and returned to New York where his brother and father had begun a business exporting textiles. In 1968 we retired to Santa Barbara.

My son George is a professor at the University of Indiana. He has two children and eight grandchildren. My daughter Edith Ostern, a retired art teacher, has three children and two grandchildren. So, in total, I have ten great-grandchildren to date.

Mike Wolff

(autobiographical narrative)

I was born in Breslau, a small town in eastern Germany on June 29, 1936. Conditions in Germany at this time were already difficult for Jewish people, so much so that my paternal grandfather Franz David was quite upset with my mother, Else, for becoming pregnant and bringing a Jewish child into the world.

As the political climate in Germany continued to deteriorate it made it ever so much harder for Jewish people to make a living and exist. Families began making arrangements to ship their children out of Germany for safekeeping. By 1939, with conditions worsening, my parents came to the conclusion that they would send me away to Scotland.

In June 1939, just three weeks before my third birthday, I joined one of the Kindertransports that would take me to England on my way to Scotland. I was the youngest of approximately 200 children slated to go. I was met in London by the Ness family. They had offered their home to care for a German-Jewish child. Mr. and Mrs. Ness and their daughter Anita, who was three years older than I, looked after me for a year and a half.

Back in Germany, my father was arrested on Kristallnacht and incarcerated by the Nazis. My mother was able to arrange his release from prison on the condition he would leave Germany, which he did immediately upon his release. In August 1939, he came to Great Britain where he was sent off to the Kitchener work camp in Kent, and then was kept in a holding camp on the Isle of Man. My mother, who was still back in Germany, was working on obtaining a visa from any country in the world that would allow her to immigrate. In late 1939, she finally obtained a visa to enter Bolivia, South America and left Germany shortly thereafter.

My father told me that he visited me in Glasgow on a few occasions during his encampment. By this time I had adopted my foster parents and would not respond to him at all. In December 1940, Mr. Ness took me to Liverpool where I met my father for the trip across the Atlantic to Bolivia. I can still remember being in Liverpool during an air raid and seeing all the broken glass. I was four years old.

My father and I arrived in Bolivia and were reunited with my mother, whom I did not recognize at first; I was very young when I last saw her. But we were lucky; lots of families were never able to see each other again. In Bolivia we lived a meager existence at first. We eventually rebuilt our lives. My family moved to Memphis in 1952. In 1959 I married Lani. We moved to Santa Barbara in 1970 where I worked as an engineer. We have a son and a daughter and four grandchildren.

In 1992 I re-established contact with Anita Ness Wober, the daughter of my Scottish foster parents.

Klara Zimmer

(autobiographical narrative)

Klara Zimmer (Claire) was born Klara Kohn on October 27, 1912 in Bucharest, Romania. Her family was Czech and returned to the Moravian town of Kromeriz at the outbreak of World War I. Her father, Edward Kohn, was killed in that war. Klara and her widowed mother Elsa were taken in by Elsa's brother, Emil Brand, who ran a café called Kavarna Brandova. The family was assimilated but did not hide their Judaism.

Klara was a frail but spirited child who adored learning and tennis, and was active in the Macabi, a Zionist organization. Klara was trained for dressmaking. It was not until she was past 80 that she shared with me, her lawyer daughter, her early ambition to study law. Her first marriage was to a pediatrician, Alfred Loff. By the time they understood the gravity of the situation for the Jews of Czechoslovakia, they were unable to obtain visas to the U.S. or any other country other than India. But, India would not accept Elsa. The family stayed together and was deported together on June 27, 1942 to the Terezin ghetto.

Klara devoted herself in Terezin to taking care of Elsa, who was nearly blind. Klara worked in the housing administration of the ghetto. Alfred worked as a pediatrician in the children's barrack. He voluntarily accompanied a transport of children to Auschwitz where they were all gassed. Not wanting to be separated from Alfred, and not knowing what Auschwitz represented, Klara and Elsa joined the next transport. On arrival in 1944, Klara and Elsa stood before Josef Mengele for selection. When Mengele pointed Elsa to the gas chambers, Klara tried to follow but was beaten back.

After the selection, Klara was in a group of 1,000 women sent for slave labor to an airplane factory in Freiberg (Sachsen), Germany (a satellite of the Flossenberg camp). Soon after the firebombing of Dresden, her group was transported to the Mauthausen camp in Austria. She was liberated in May 1945 by the American Army.

Klara returned alone to Kromeriz. In late 1945 she met Josef Pepik Zimmer, a survivor who had lost his wife and child in Auschwitz. They married and immigrated to Montreal, Canada after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948. In Canada, Klara took in sewing alterations to pay for my piano, ballet, French and German lessons. In 1963 the family moved to San Diego.

Klara immigrated again in1995 to live with her daughter, Jana, and Jana's husband in Santa Barbara, where she enjoyed the ocean and her bridge games.

She died peacefully in her own bed on October 31, 2000, as was her most fervent desire. Her great-grandchildren Max and Sophia were born in August 2001. They will be taught that in her modest life she embodied courage, compassion and a fine sense of justice.

Assembly Member Fran Pavley

AD41

Is honored to present

the story of Holocaust Survivor

Rita Lurie

Acknowledgement

Leslie Gilbert-Lurie

Mark Kelly

Nedra Gray

Adam Panish

Malibu High School

Rita Lurie

by Emmanuelle Stahler

A petite, elegant woman, when Rita Lurie walked through the door, she commanded respect with her presence. There was simply something remarkable about her strength. Her cologne and handbag were graceful and she spoke in an interesting though unidentifiable accent as though it had been colored by her many travels. Rita Lurie, born Rahel Gamss, did not look like a woman who survived for two years in an attic living on rejected horse feed. But she did.

"I was with my family," she said. "We were fourteen people in one attic."

When Rita was just four years old, the Nazis took over her small hometown in Poland. Her large and very prominent family had been in the cattle business. As a successful family, their neighbors were polite to them but "during certain holidays there would be unrest" among the gentile segments of the town's population.

When the Nazi occupation began in her hometown in 1942, Rita's family found out just how unfriendly the neighbors actually were.

After receiving a letter telling the family to go to the train station they realized that they had to go into hiding. The letter was too suspicious and they did not believe they would be safe if they went. Although their town Urzejowice was close to the Russian border, they decided that they could not escape to Russia because of the many small children.

Rita's family and her aunt's family, both of which had young children, went into hiding together. They separated from her grandparents and other aunts who did not have babies. The rationale was that without the noise that children make, the others would have a better chance of surviving.

"We took whatever we could carry on our backs and went into the forest and hid in ditches and haystacks or wherever we could," she said.

Rita's family decided to get in touch with a family friend whom her grandparents had helped in the past and whom her uncle Marcus had been in the Polish army with. Marcus made his way to the farmhouse where the friend, Pom (Mr. in Polish) Grajolski lived. He wanted to help but was afraid for his family. His wife was also hesitant to take them in.

Because the man was "a decent person" and because the family offered "bribes and promises" he agreed to take them in for a few weeks.

Every so often, Grajolski would come up to the attic and say that he could not keep them any longer. Rita's family gave them everything so that they would be able to stay. The attic was miserable. The family would huddle against the cracks in the wall so that they could feel a little bit of air or sunlight, but it was safer than the outside world.

"My mother gave them her engagement ring so we could stay," she said.

The family waited. They did not know what was happening in the outside world. When Grajolski would get a newspaper, he would bring it up to the attic but that was infrequent. After the first few weeks, Grajolski's family gave them even less food. There was "nothing," no milk and barely any water. Driven by their starvation, Rita's father would sneak down during the night and pick up whatever produce he could. They began to eat raw onions and potatoes. Rita's uncle would knock on doors to ask for milk. Usually people would tell her uncle to go away or they would kill him, but occasionally some would give him small amounts of cheese or other food.

"We spent two years in the attic and it kept getting worse and worse," she said. "People were losing hope and my brother got sick. When he cried a pillow was stuffed in his mouth to muffle the sound. Eventually my brother passed away. We still are not sure if it was because a relative pushed a pillow on his face too hard. He was a beautiful little boy and very smart. My mom died about six weeks after, not long before the war was ended."

Rita's two young twin cousins also passed away. Only a few weeks into hiding, the family realized that they could not keep the babies and put them on a church step. The twins did not make it.

When Grajolski thought the war was over it was still a bit premature. They knew that some change was happening because they could see the flares where fighting was occurring and they were worried that the straw they slept on would catch fire from the sparks. After two years, the Russians finally freed them.

They left the attic and began to walk. A Russian soldier saw them from a distance and pointed a gun at them. As they drew closer however, he realized that they were survivors.

"He said that he was a Russian Jew and that he was going to help us get home," she said.

They walked home and when they got there, their home was unrecognizable. It had been the home of a young family, just starting out, with beautiful furniture. Some of the rooms hadn't even been furnished yet. When they got there however, a family of Poles from their town was occupying the house. They left but told Rita's family that they could only stay a few days or they would be killed. They said that there was no place for Jews in Poland.

They stayed at the house, sleeping on the floor of their home because the furniture had been removed. But again, harbingers of danger appeared. After a few days, someone knocked on their door and told the family that if they were there in the morning, they would be killed. Then, Marcus walked to Rita's aunt's house and found her aunt and her aunt's husband bound and gagged. Rita's family heard rumors that this was happening to Jews all over Poland.

They decided they must leave when Rita's 16 year-old cousin found them. He had lived in the forest and then gone into hiding with another Polish family from whom he had learned that Rita's family would be killed soon.

Rita's family found a man, from what was at the time Palestine, who was helping survivors.

"We were transported by horse and buggy," she said. "There was a displaced person's camp in a big, gray, cement commercial building in Zeschof. We were there for about six weeks."

Her family began to plan, discussing where they could go that treated Jews well. Rita also came out of their confinement with tuberculosis and rickets, which made it harder for the family to obtain visas. The family was given food at the displaced person's camp but they had trouble eating.

"It was the best care we had gotten in years," she said. "We had hotdogs and we couldn't keep it down. People were beginning to feel hope but we had to leave because it was dangerous for survivors."

The family began to travel, never staying anyplace for too long. Big canvas covered army tanks transported them from city to city. They went to Czechoslovakia for about six months, then Hungary then Austria.

"My father contacted a guy to help us get into Italy. We walked across the Alps," she said.

Rita's family stayed in many towns in Italy, some for weeks and some mere days, but they ended up in Cremona, Italy. It became their home for the next nearly five years. Her family rented, for as long as they could afford, the second story of a house in Cremona. After that first six months, they were in a displaced person's camp. Her father did not speak Italian and it was difficult for him to work.

Rita was hospitalized, in Italy, for T.B for nine months.

"Somehow I absorbed some of the language while I was hospitalized," she said. "And I heard the doctors say I had a slim chance of surviving so every night I was up I was

expecting to die. At that point I was eight. I did not want to stay there at first but then I became adjusted and the nuns comforted me."

Rita was very loyal to her faith. At one point the priests attempted to give her the sacrament but she pretended to faint so that she did not have to eat it.

Rita's father eventually remarried. The woman was younger and had been in a concentration camp. Rita and her sister were confused. They still thought their mother was coming back because no one had explained to them what had happened. Her father had two more sons with her stepmother.

"My father had been a very strong man," she said. "He was a handsome leader but he was starting to diminish."

The family stayed in Italy for three more years until they could get their visas. They were delayed when her new little brother got sick. Then Rita became seasick on the voyage to the United States and almost died.

"My resistance was so low and I ate very little and was very skinny and I couldn't fight anything off so I was terribly seasick," she said. "I gave everything up. It was really a horrible journey."

They came to the United States about one week before Thanksgiving. They did not go through Ellis Island because at the time it was closed for renovation.

"A distant uncle brought us here," she said. "We came to Brooklyn. My aunt and her family came over first so they were already situated in Brooklyn when we got here." Their uncle, who was very wealthy, had brought her aunt's family over.

Rita's father had also sent his younger brothers on ahead as he was very protective of them. Rita's family had Thanksgiving with all her family who were in Brooklyn. They soon began to see however, that they were becoming a burden to their family after a few days so they moved to the Bronx.

After the move, Rita and her older sister attended their first public school. Their stepmother was not very involved with the girls so their aunt came with them to enroll them in P.S. 82 Junior High School. Although the girls did not speak any English, after interviewing them via a translator, the principal decided to put the girls into the seventh and eighth grade with their age group. The principal made it clear that if they couldn't keep up, they would be put into the 1st grade. She worked hard and with the help of her school friends, Rita spoke English within two months.

"It was a question of survival," she said. "Wherever I went I absorbed the language."

Rita adjusted. She made friends and joined clubs. Then her father moved the family to Chicago, which was another terrible readjustment for Rita and her sister. An uncle had asked her father to join him in his business there, but that fell through.

Rita struggled with loneliness through high school. She had friends but after graduating in 1965 a huge depression hit her.

"It was like my body said it was time to deal with all of my losses," she said.

Rita dealt with years of depression. She got a job so she could support her therapy even though her father was against it.

One of her bosses recommended that she meet a man who was perfect for her. Although she was not interested in marriage, at only 18, she agreed to finally meet him. Her boss turned out to be right. She is now married to that man, Frank Lurie, and they have six grandchildren together.

"I had a lot to deal with and cope with but we've been married now for almost forty-nine years," she said.

Rita still has issues from the Holocaust that she has not dealt with. Every once in a while something will bring back an unresolved issue and she will go back to therapy. Although she is not consistently in therapy, she still had things that she has to talk through.

Rita was a social worker for a time. She worked with children who had drug dependencies and also volunteered at her temple. She also taught adult classes after being Batz mitzvah-ed 16 years ago with a group of seven other adults who had been children during the Holocaust.

Now Rita travels with her husband and enjoys her children and grandchildren. She has finished the first draft of a book she is writing with her eldest daughter Leslie, which is about her Holocaust experiences and her daughter's reaction to those experiences. The book will most likely be called Bending Towards the Sun.

ASSEMBLY MEMBER MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
AD 48

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

RENEE FIRESTONE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
JASON KATZ OF THE SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER

Renee Firestone

by Jessica Leigh Boyd

In 2006, many people of different ethnic groups and faiths live in communities together peacefully all over the world. It is no coincidence that these are the places that are generally among the most powerful countries, and most enticing places in which to live. As a result of our tolerance and respect for one another, Americans of different races work together, share ides, and form friendships every day. Because I am privileged to live in a society where tolerance and diversity are so important, I, an African American, was given the opportunity to participate in and make a contribution to what would otherwise be a strictly Jewish event: The California Assembly's Holocaust Remembrance week. I hope that my participation will help to ensure that future generations neither practice nor tolerate the cruelty and discrimination of the past.

I recently interviewed Mrs. Renee Firestone, an eighty-two year old holocaust survivor whose life is an extraordinary story of survival. Renee was born in 1924 in Czechoslovakia, one large Eastern European country that is now broken into the countries of The Czech Republic. Her birth name was Renee Weinfeld (the *W* pronounced like our *V*), and she was born into an upper-middle class Jewish family. Renee's family were not observant Jews, but lived among many who were. Most of the observant Jews in hers and surrounding communities were Hassidic Jews (Hassidim is the plural). Renee's father ran a moderately lucrative textile business, her mother was a homemaker, her brother was five years her senior and her sister four years her junior. Her family was assimilated with several non-Jewish families in their community, but Renee recalls that she hardly witnessed any anti-Semitism.

Renee's family found out that Hitler had become chancellor of Germany in 1933 when Renee was nine years old. The Nazi power started affecting her life in 1938 when Hungary first occupied Czechoslovakia and the Czech Jews became Hungarian Jews. Many of their civil rights were taken away. Specifically, the Jews had curfews, movement and assembly restrictions placed upon them, much like my own ancestors under the South African system of Apartheid. The decade of the 30's was the beginning of nearly two decades of incredibly horrible events and tragedies to come in the Weinfeld's lives.

Renee explained that the Jews of the region knew of Hitler before the war, when he first campaigned to persuade the people of Europe, at least all who would listen and were open to his bigotry, of the importance of "protecting the Arian Race". She described Hitler's campaign as one to "recruit, evangelize, and proselytize" Hitler's ideas in what were called *"Beer Halls"* all over Germany, Hungary, and other nearby places. Hitler's campaigners worked much like a used car salesman uses "hard sell" techniques today. The scary thing

was, Hitler was good at it, and was training many others to do his evil work all over Europe, but mostly throughout Germany.

Over the next 5 years or so, Hitler's propaganda campaign changed to one of hostile takeovers of neighboring European countries. Renee's family would receive news about Hitler's invasions throughout Europe, and she talked about a secret deal between Hitler and Russian Leader Joseph Stalin to invade Poland together in 1939. Poland had over 3 million Jews at that time, which was the largest Jewish population in the world then. At that same time Renee's homeland of Czechoslovakia was occupied by Hungary. Since Hungary and Germany were allied at the time, the Weinfelds and their neighbors assumed that they were safe in Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately and frighteningly, they couldn't have been more wrong.

Hitler did indeed invade Poland in 1939, and by 1941 he had pushed the Russians out. Hungary was then still an ally of Germany, and during the time of the Vanssa Conference in 1942, when Hitler came up with the idea for his "killing factories," the Czech Jews in Hungary were the only Jews in Eastern Europe who remained relatively intact. But when the Hungarian president refused to send the Jewish families to Hitler's new execution camps, Hitler's armies took control and double-crossed the Hungarians just as they had the Russians. Soon the Germans posted signs all over Renee's community with new and even more oppressive instructions for Jewish families to follow. The last posted sign that Renee ever saw in her neighborhood gave her and her neighbors an ultimatum to pack and leave for a labor camp within twenty four hours. Renee remembers the exact date that it happened: March 9, 1944. Everyone in her family, except for her brother, was deported in cattle cars to Auschwitz. Her brother would be sent to a labor camp in Hungary.

I almost could not believe Mrs. Firestone's recollection of horrible events that took place thereafter. When they arrived at Auschwitz Renee's mother was killed immediately (why the mother Renee did not know). Her father and sister were taken and later killed, and Renee did not know the fate of her brother at the time.

Renee was housed in a small barracks with eleven other people, all of whom slept in a 6-foot by 6-foot bed, in foot-to-head formation (again, ironically, like my African ancestors on the European slave ships to America centuries before). The people in Renee's bunk all had their heads shaven and were given a jumper made of thin cloth. These were their only clothes, and I can only imagine how their hygiene must have suffered. Roll call was done at several different times a day, starting at about four o'clock in the morning.

The captives were told to stand in rows of five, and each row would share one bowl of "so-called soup", as Mrs. Firestone referred to it. The mealtime experience, one that we (my generation) understandably take for granted, was typical of the no-win situation that everything in Jewish life became in Nazi Germany. As Ms. Firestone told it, those Jews who desperately needed food would try to secure a spot as number 1, 2, or 3 in the front of the row, even fighting their brethren if they had to, because these persons would be the first

to get the soup bowl, and could thereby drink their fill (well, almost their fill). But in doing so those front-liners also ran the risk of being the first chosen for execution.

At the same time, while the number 4 and 5 persons were likely to get a mere sip from the soup bowl, if any at all, they could at least take comfort in the knowledge that they were a lot less likely to be taken away for execution. At times it seemed difficult to tell who was actually on the worst end of this gruesome equation. In case, the Jews' mealtime choice, like almost every other choice in the Holocaust captives' Nazi encampment experience, was a calculated choice between life and death; and one dared not calculate wrongly.

The executions were mostly coordinated by the man the Jews referred to as *"the Angel of Death"*. The Angel of Death, who's real name was Dr. Mengele, was looked upon as a god in Auschwitz, both by the German soldiers who had been told that Mengele's "genius" was legendary, and by the Jews, who knew that like a god, Mengele held their lives in his hands

As the war raged on, the Jews received no news while in Auschwitz until near the war's end. Sometimes they could also tell when something major happened by the differences in their daily routine in the camps. On the night before their liberation, Renee recalled that the Jews in her camp heard bombing outside of their compound. The next morning, Renee and her bunkmates remained inside and immediately noticed that they did not have the usual roll-call that morning. Confused and scared, they stayed clustered in their room next to each other until one woman who could no longer stand the suspense ran outside to find out what was happening. Now, this lady was really taking her life into her hands here, and could have easily been shot or snatched up on the spot. But she just had to know what was happening.

There was a camp with French political prisoners all male nearby Renee's. The lady from Renee's camp was able to make it out of their compound, where the men from the neighboring camp informed her that they were free. She returned to tell Renee and her fellow captives that the war was over and they were free, but no one really knew how to react. Later that day, a huge Russian officer (as Mrs. Firestone described him) rode in to their camp on horseback, came up to their bunkhouse and asked the ladies if they were Jewish. They were again terrified, since the Germans soldiers guarding them had repeatedly told them that if they went down in defeat, they would surely kill as many Jews as possible before they themselves were killed.

Finally, one woman answered yes to the Russian officer's question. The officer jumped down from his horse, hugged the woman and began to cry. He then explained that he himself was Jewish and had been forced to conceal his ethnicity until then. Renee was finally free! After what seemed like an eternity in hell, Renee Weinfeld was freed at Auschwitz.

How anyone could cope after being torn from their family and living in such horrible conditions is almost inconceivable to me. But just like my ancestors who came here forcibly

from Africa, Renee Weinfeld, incredibly, did survive!

Mrs. Firestone told me that the Jews in her camp walked away with a strong but simple motto: "NEVER AGAIN!" To fulfill that motto, she shares her incredible story and horrible experiences so that our generation can join the Holocaust survivors in their lifelong journey to rid the world of the kind of atrocity that they lived through.

After Liberation, Mrs. Firestone wandered around Europe for three months before miraculously, and quite accidentally, being reunited with her brother. It turns out that he was sent to a labor camp, from which he escaped and immediately took action as a *"partisan",* or freedom fighter. Renee got married and had a child soon after liberation. She and her family were not permitted to come to the United States because only a certain number of people were allowed into the country. They waited for three years for their *"quota numbers"* to come up. Their quota number was the number that would allow them to immigrate to America. Eventually, their quota number was declared valid, and Renee and her family came to the USA.

Though Renee had difficulty making peace with the world, she pressed forward and tried to live a good life. Today she is a volunteer speaker at the Museum of Tolerance at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, sharing her story with anyone who wishes to hear it. Renee's strength through years of pain and suffering, and also her perseverance to enjoy life, will inspire people for years to come. She certainly inspired my dad and me when we listened to her. As she left us, Mrs. Firestone stressed that we must never forget the Holocaust and that all races must, at the very least, have respect for each other. I now definitely have tremendous respect for Holocaust Survivors like Mrs. Renee Firestone and their descendants, and I am very thankful to God for having had the opportunity to meet and listen to Mrs. Renee Firestone.

Jessica Leigh Boyd is a 10th Grader in Bishop Montgomery High School

ASSEMBLY MEMBER LORI SALDANA
AD76

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

LOU DUNST

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

NEW LIFE CLUB OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Lou Dunst

by Ryan Wulff

I begin with the very last words Lou Dunst spoke to me when we met for this interview. "If one of my words touches just one person, then we have done a good job." If that is truly the case then his goal was accomplished before I even sat down to write this account. Not a single day has gone by since I spoke with him where I have not heard his voice or pictured in my mind parts of his tale. I am not alone in my response to this vibrant man who is eighty years young. I have read numerous letters sent to him by men and women of all ages who have heard him speak. From high school students to the Supreme Court, his words have touched many souls. Hopefully I can do him a small justice by helping to pass along this story and fulfill his desire to make sure these events will not be forgotten.

Lou Dunst was born in 1926 in a poor, small village called Jasina (ya-SEE-na) near the highest point of the Carpathian Mountains in country that no longer exists, called Czechoslovakia. There were really just two main streets in the whole village, and everyone knew who everyone was. Jasina is still a bustling little town today and Lou went back recently to visit his birthplace. He even found his old house, still in the hands of the family that moved in after his was forced out. In fact, the whole village seemed almost exactly the same as he remembered it. There was only one notable change he could see. Not a single one of its residents were Jewish. When Lou was growing up, there were 250 to 300 Jewish families living in Jasina and four synagogues spread out so no one would have to walk very far to reach one on the Sabbath. He fondly remembers these walks with his father, mother, sister and brother. Now nothing remains but Lou Dunst's memory of what happened to those families of Jasina and the many like them spread throughout Europe.

The unfortunate truth of the matter is that practically none of these families had any idea what lay in store for them after the Third Reich rose to power in the early 1930's. How could they foresee such atrocities? Anti-Semitism already existed. Jews around the world were used to derogatory statements, and had ignored them for centuries. They had dealt with random acts of aggression, and let it pass with a "he's drunk" or "he doesn't know what he's doing." As the 1930's progressed these incidents became more frequent and the situation seemed to keep getting worse and worse. Lou was in public school at this point, only about 8 or 9 years old, yet with each passing month the tension between Jewish and non-Jewish children continued to escalate. Fights broke out constantly. In 1937, when Lou was eleven years old, he and his brother, Irving, were kicked out of school.

Such conflicts were not restricted to schools. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were written. Among them was an edict that allowed for the legal transfer of Jewish properties and businesses to local members of the Nazi party. Lou's father, Marcus, owned and operated a small retail business selling general merchandise. At first, his father was not

allowed to buy flour because he was Jewish. Then his sales permit was revoked. Still, families allowed these affronts to happen thinking it would pass like all the rest of the episodes of prejudice they had endured.

The following year, bits and pieces of news from Austria spread through the town. The German army had marched into Austria, rounded up all the Jews they could find and made them scrub the sidewalks with toothbrushes while they spat at them, kicked them, and urinated on them. I asked Lou how his family, and the local Jewish community, reacted to such news. "We couldn't comprehend this. We were in a small village. It seemed so far away and not real."

In October of 1938 things started to hit closer to home. Hitler was given Sudetenland, a large portion of Czechoslovakia, which surrounded the Carpathian Mountains. Then on November 9, 1938 the whole world became aware that something very real was indeed happening. We now refer to that as *Kristallnacht* (Kreh-SHTALL-not), the Night of Broken Glass. In all, 101 synagogues were destroyed and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed. 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Jews were physically attacked and beaten and 91 were killed[1]. Little Jasina, covered in snow, received very little of this news. What little made it through brought the Dunst family to the one house in the whole neighborhood that had a radio. They strained to hear reports from London but everything was distorted and not very much could be made out. Once again, life went on as the families of Jasina thought such things would never reach all the way to their small corner of the world.

Meanwhile, things continued to get worse for Lou's family. The Nuremberg Laws were invoked in Jasina. His father's business was completely taken from him and signed over to a local Nazi. Jews were banned from most public places. The four or five families who had enough wealth to do so, packed up and left town. Word then came that Hitler had given the Carpathian region to the Ukrainians on the condition that all Jews in the area be exterminated. Lou remembers, "We still couldn't imagine they would come to kill us. We felt very secure. We were not criminals. We had done nothing wrong." A few weeks later, rumor trickled down to the family that their father's name was on a list of men who were to be hanged. They never found out if that was true thanks to the Hungarians who came to occupy the region next, driving out and killing most of the Ukrainians responsible for those threats.

By 1940, the German army and their allies controlled most of Eastern Europe and what little rights the Jewish community had left vanished completely. Lou's father was taken and used for slave labor, which he called Munkatobor (MOONK-ata-bo). They were used to sweep fields for mines, fix equipment, and anything else the Germans wanted. They were beaten, starved, and constantly threatened with further punishment. Lou himself,

1 Snyder, Louis L. Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. New York: Paragon House, 1989:201

a mere fourteen year old, was also used for a similar labor, called Levente (LEV-en-teh). The Germans made him and other youths load and unload military equipment or shovel snow. They were sometimes forced to work day and night while beaten, starving and freezing. Lou was told if he did not keep showing up for work a severe punishment awaited him. Just the thought of a more stringent punishment than what they were going through was enough to make them obey.

Fears heightened in 1941, when Jewish people from neighboring cities were brought into Jasina in boxcars. " There were men, women, and children screaming and crying for food. We tried to share but we didn't have enough. There were thousands and thousands of them." The Germans took them from the boxcars and they were put into trucks or made to march along side as they headed into the wilderness. The ones who couldn't keep up were shot or left for the vultures. Finally, they were chased into ravines and told to remove everything of value. The German soldiers opened fire to massacre the whole lot. Some survived and since there was no ammunition left, the soldiers tied their hands and feet and threw them in a nearby river. A few nights later there was a knock at the door of Lou's house. Standing shivering in front of them was a seventeen-year old girl who had managed to make it out of the river alive. The Dunsts helped her clean up and gave her some clothes. She thanked them somberly and left to try and find out if her parents were still alive.

By this time Marcus had returned from Munkatobor. The family was just trying to survive when there was a knock on their door in the middle of the night. They were told to get a few things together and get ready to go into town. As they made their way to the center of the village they realized that every Jew in Jasina was being marched into town. After a few days and nights cramped in a theater building, they were all led to the local Jewish cemetery on top of a nearby hill. Whispers filtered through the crowd that they were going to have to dig their own graves and then be gunned down. "That was the particular method of killing at that time, in that particular area of Eastern Europe. Most Jews from Belarus, Ukraine, and other areas were shot like that right outside of town. We got to the cemetery and there they were with the trucks, and the shovels, and the machine guns. What else could we do but pray?"

What happened next was both the answer to their prayers and the beginning of a nightmare worse than they ever imagined that would prove to become the ultimate test of their faith. Shouts rang out among the German ranks as orders were changed and passed along. The entire group was marched from the cemetery to the railroad and put into boxcars. "Men, women, pregnant women, and children were all smashed together without food, water or toilet facilities. When that train left there were no Jews left in Jasina and until this day it remains that way."

The train stopped in Mateszalka, Hungary. Everyone was taken from the boxcars and put in a ghetto where they were closed in like caged animals and told to follow strict rules that were posted on a piece of paper. Immediately it was made clear that anyone who tried to escape would be shot. Whatever possessions they had managed to keep with them

up until this point were taken and body cavity searches were the punishment for anyone who did not comply. With nothing left, Lou's family awaited their fate, thankful to be together.

Their answer came as they were marched to the railroad and once again put into boxcars. By now, however, the situation had exacerbated because a number of people had health problems. They traveled for days, constantly stopping as more boxcars were added. Soon the floor was covered in human waste. They had no idea where they were going and could not see outside. "When we got to the last stop, they made everybody get out in a hurry. 'In a hurry.' Everything they did was always in a hurry. Some of us were dying; some were dead; some were lying in their own excrement; some were giving birth; some had gone a little berserk; and some of us were able to get out."

"Those of us able to get out were approached by what looked like prisoners. They were mostly Jewish, like 95% of them, so we spoke to them in the Jewish language and inquired where we were. They told us we were in Auschwitz, but we had no idea what Auschwitz was. They explained we were going to be gassed and cremated, but we did not believe them. We thought they were crazy. So they showed us. 'See those chimneys?' Yes. 'See the smoke' Yes. 'Can you smell it?' Yes, but we still did not believe them. We knew we were decent human beings, we had done nothing wrong, we didn't steal anything and we didn't kill anyone."

Before they could learn anymore they were chased forward towards the top brass of Auschwitz who were standing regally in their spotless uniforms, boots shined like a mirror, ready to separate them. They motioned them one way or another and if someone did not understand he or she was beaten until they did. "My mother and sister had to go another way and that was the last time I saw my mother." Lou's voiced cracked and he paused for a moment. This was only time he did this in the entire interview and it is a moment that has stayed with me ever since. Lou continued, "Shortly after, my brother and I were separated from our father. He was murdered at Auschwitz or on the death marches when they had to evacuate it, we are not sure which."

"We were marched on to a huge pile of clothing; it was like a mountain of clothing. We were told to undress quickly. We asked, 'Where are the people from all of these clothes?' We were told they went through the chimney. We now started to believe what those men had been telling us." Any strong, young men were separated and sent to carry bodies from the crematorium to the fire pits. At this point, they were exterminating 12,000 to 15,000 people per day and that was too much of a burden on the crematorium. Thus, whatever men still had strength in them were used to take the overflow of bodies to large pits where they were set on fire. This took so much energy that those strong, young men were usually dead themselves in a matter of days. The only ray of hope Lou had was that his brother Irving, two years older than him, still remained by his side. Their group was put into barracks, with each bunk holding around fifteen people.

A few weeks later, they were once again loaded onto boxcars and shipped to Mauthausen (MATH-how-sun), a concentration camp notorious for its use of torture. There they were quarantined and told to stack themselves like sardines when it was time to sleep. As uncomfortable as it was, most fell asleep immediately due to weeks of exhaustion, thirst, and starvation. The commander came and personally told them they need not worry about eating anymore as they were to be gassed soon. Sure enough several days later, Lou's group was herded into the gas chamber and the doors were locked from the outside. Once again, all they could do was pray.

A short while later the doors flung open and they were told to march out to the Appel Platz, a large open field where the numbers of prisoners were counted twice a day. The commander spoke to them again, this time saying that the fuel required to burn their bodies had become too expensive. Instead they would be sent "to a place where they would vanish without causing further expense to the Third Reich."

They were lined up and given a metal bracelet with a number on it. Lou's was 68122 and his brother, still right behind him, was 68123. Then it was back to the railroad and, for the last time, back into the boxcars. They did not have to go far as their final destination was Ebensee (EH-ben-zay), a sub-camp of Mauthausen. This sub-camp was now home to almost 25,000 people. Conditions in Ebensee were the worst of all. They were worked day and night no matter what the weather. They continued to be beaten, and men were shot, hung or tortured for no reason at all. The commander of this camp would set men free in the woods nearby and hunt them for sport with his dogs. Typhoid fever and other diseases were rampant. The daily rations at Auschwitz had been a cup a coffee (dirty water) for breakfast, two to three spoonfuls of that same water with a few potato peelings for lunch, and a finger-thick slice of rotten bread for dinner if they were lucky. At Ebensee they were lucky if they got anything at all. People began to eat whatever they could find. Eating parasites on their own bodies, blades of grass, bits of coal and even acts of cannibalism occurred. Dead bodies were everywhere.

Early on his brother was chosen for a different working group and they spent time in opposite areas of camp. They would steal away when they could to meet and at first, Irving brought Lou some small bites of food. Lou ravenously devoured them but regretted it soon after. "I thought, what am I doing here? Why am I taking this from him? At least one of us could survive this, so from then on I refused to take from him." Working around the clock, with no food, took its toll on Lou's body. He eventually became what was referred to as a muselmann (MOO-sill-man). He was extremely emaciated and had lost the use of his muscles. He could not stand or walk and had no desire to live. Lou was eighteen years old. With fuel still too costly the crematoriums were no longer in use. As a result, Lou was thrown on top of a pile of other muselmann right next to the old crematorium. Most of them were dead while the rest lay slowly dying there next to Lou.

As fate would have it, the American Army was only days away. On May 6, 1945, two American tanks came and Ebensee was liberated. Irving came rushing to find his brother

to get him and tell him the news. "Lou, we're free! We're liberated! We're going to get something to eat!" This was too much for Lou to comprehend in his current state and Irving did not wait for a response. He pulled Lou down off of the pile, and brought him to the Americans. Both of them were transported to a hospital in Prague named Podoly Sanatorium. Fifty years later, Lou went back to that same hospital to personally thank them for saving his life. This year, he will meet one of the American tank commanders that drove into Ebensee so he can personally thank him as well.

Leaving Lou in Prague, still very weak, Irving headed back towards Jasina to find their older sister, Ruzena, and their mother. Making his way through the mountains on the tops of boxcars this time, leaving word and messages where he could, Irving found his sister and learned the fate of their mother. Ruzena had suffered a mental breakdown from the ordeal, but was otherwise intact. Her days had been spent cleaning up German cities after the Allies were through bombing them. They were all eventually reunited, and still remain close today.

"I want you to know now, everyone asks me did I still, did I always believe in God? It was non-negotiable for me. Of course I did. God was there all the time. Even through all the killing, God was there. God can not control an individual's mind. If they wanted to kill, they could kill. But just like the Bible says, God will fight for you, you stand still. This is exactly what happened. I did not kill anyone to be liberated. I did nothing. Some people in the camp wanted to know, 'Where was God?' But not me. I talked to God many times. I wanted to commit suicide and I talked to God because you couldn't talk to anyone else. Everyone else had the same problems you had. God said, 'Why should you be different than everyone else?' I said I wanted to live then so I could tell about what happened here. That is why I am obligated to tell my story, you see? Because I made that promise."

Lou Dunst carries no hatred for any one. He has calmly listened to young men telling him that "Hitler did not kill enough Jews." His response was, "He didn't kill only Jews. He killed Germans, his own kind. He left a million of his own soldiers to die at Stalingrad alone." Today we live in a world where every hate crime that occurs leaves ten people seeking revenge. This cycle of death and destruction feeds on itself and continues unbroken. There is a lot we can learn from Lou. His hope was that just one of his words could reach someone. The words that struck me were how throughout the escalation in the 1930's, Lou repeatedly said it felt "so far away and not real." I had just read an article that morning about a situation in Africa that contained the word genocide. I have never been there, can not imagine what it is like there, and felt like it was "so far away and not real." Using Lou's own words, "It is every human being's duty to make sure that things like this will never happen again."

ASSEMBLY MEMBER SIMON SALINAS
AD28

IS HONORED TO PRESENT
THE STORY OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

HAROLD GORDON

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

SALINAS HIGH SCHOOL
BLAISE DIGIORALAMO
SANDRA MAY

Harold Gordon

by Erin Butler

Standing outside the house in a community where all the lawns are freshly mowed, no car appears to be dirty, and a presence of wealth seems to be obvious. Everything seems to be in order for an upper-middle class family living here. Mr. Harold Gordon, a Holocaust survivor, and his beautiful wife, Joyce, open their door with smiles and outstretched hands. From the eye of a stranger, nothing seems to have ever troubled their lives. From the poor ghettos in Poland to the predominantly white neighborhood in California, the owner of this home has definitely earned his comfortable life.

Harold, or his given name of Hirshel, who was a nine-year-old boy when the Second World War began, grew up in Grodno, Poland with his Jewish family. His father owned a local barber shop which, unbeknownst to Harold or his family, was to be one key factor in his survival of the Holocaust. A homemaker, his mother kept Harold and his younger brother from realizing their true financial standings. Although his four person family lived in a one room apartment with a kitchen and no electricity or plumbing, Harold was unaware that he, to the standards of the world, was poor. His mother and her family were extremely observant of their religion and much respected in the community, while his father's family was considerably less observant and considered non-believers. Much of Harold's extended family lived near him and aided in Harold's ability to see different things such as the doctor's house, or a candy store which was owned by one of his uncles. Harold's grandmother on his mother's side was fortunate enough to own a bakery which gave him the nickname of "Hirshy the Baker's grandson". The area in Grodno in which the Gordon family lived was a self-imposed ghetto where most everyone spoke Yiddish. The chiefly Jewish community was secluded from the rest of the unreceptive Polish town although most everyone in his area got along well. The Jews helped greatly with the economy and provided jobs for many people not of the Jewish faith. Harold attended regular school through 5th grade as well as Jewish school after for which his mother provided a special tutor. Playing with his friends, looking after his brother, and helping with chores was part of daily life for Harold.

Without warning, on September 1, 1939, the Germans began attacking to the surprise of most people. A non-aggression pact between Germany and Russia was made, partitioning between the two countries. Luckily, for Harold's family, Russia was to occupy Grodno. With the Russians came fear and uncertainty to all Polish citizens. Using his grandmother's resources, Harold's family obtained and stored many sacks of flour for bread. The barber shop which Harold's father owned was seized by the Russians and he was forced to become an employee in his own business. The Jews knew nothing of Hitler or of Nazism until the war broke out, and then still, they were informed very little of the situation at hand. A few of the people that escaped death at the hand of the Nazi's came back to tell of the horrors

they witnessed, yet no one could believe their stories were true. The Russian principal at Harold's new school was sympathetic towards the Jews and allowed him to miss classes on Saturday in order to observe the Sabbath. Harold became fluent in Russian very quickly and helped his family learn the language as well. To keep his feet warm and dry, Russian soldiers showed Harold how to wrap his feet with rags to fill the extra space in his shoes. The people who had ruled Poland were removed from their posts and in most cases replaced by communists who, very often, had just been released from prison. Living conditions for the Jewish communities grew worse.

After two years under Russian rule, the Germans invaded and took over the area in which Russia had formally been commanding. The streets became unsafe with German soldiers willing to shoot at anything that moved. Any unlocked door was an open invitation for the soldiers to come in and take anything they pleased or rape and kill at will. The press was one of the first enterprises in which the Germans took over. Posters informed the population of any procedure the Nazi party would be carrying out. The first was to collect all weapons from citizens, followed by the order to turn in all radios. Every person was forced to register and obtain an identification card. Soon after, all Jews were instructed to wear a Star of David on the left side of their shirt. All raw materials were stripped from the town, supposedly to help in the war efforts. Everyone was forced to live off the land and obtain what they could to survive. Harold's father cut hair and gave shaves in trade for food or even firewood. This skill enabled him to supply food for his family and the relatives that had no particular talent to use. A more dramatic order came that all Jews living outside a Jewish sector had to move into one. Ten foot walls were erected around each sector, with only one gate to the outside, guarded by the SS. Harold's uncle became, or so everyone believed, mentally ill. He would refer to Jews as "walking corpses." Later, it was realized that he was not crazy, but only had a vision of the future.

The Nazis began asking for volunteer men to leave the ghetto for work detail. Many people were eager and volunteered immediately. It was realized the next day, when the men had not returned, that something was askew. When people began refusing to leave, the SS entered the ghetto with automatic weapons and demanded that everyone on a particular block exit their homes. They were forced to line up in the street, and everyone was killed. This happened several times in order to show the Jews that they were ruled by the Nazis. A year later, a great number of SS troops entered the ghetto very early in the morning, demanding everyone out of their homes. People were told they would be sent to work in factories as slave labor to help with the war effort. When the time came for Harold's family to be taken away, they layered on clothes and carried as much as they could. The entire group was forced to participate in the death march to the first of many camps Harold would see, "Kelbasin."

This place, a detention camp used to hold prisoners before the group was sent elsewhere, was Harold's first view of what the next several years in his life were to be like. Approximately one hundred people were forced into one barrack. The only places to sleep were the hard wooden benches or the floor. The food for one day- a thin soup containing

a few potato peelings and a moldy loaf of bread- was to be shared among eight people. There was little or no light and one small, wood burning stove in the center of the room. It was here that Harold's father traded something of value to a Polish wagon driver, who had been delivering rations, in return for the driver smuggling him out of the camp. A few days later, his father returned, dressed as a Polish wagon driver. His plan was to smuggle his two sons in the wagon, the way he had been. Harold and his brother followed their father to the wagon, but Harold's brother was stopped for questioning at one of the gates and made to remain inside. Harold made it to the wagon and got inside to hide. Near the gate to the outside of the camp, Harold's father informed him that he must get out of the wagon, for the lager master, or camp commander, was at the gate. After the lager master drove away, Harold ran and jumped into the back of the wagon and exited the camp with his father. Five days later, Harold's father returned as a Polish driver to retrieve his second son and wife, only to find that their transport had departed the night before. Harold and his father would never again see this mother, brother, or any of the other family that had been with them.

The only friend and relative Harold had left was his father. With nowhere else to go, they returned to the Grodno ghetto in Poland. While in Grodno, the remaining Jews were placed in a synagogue for ultimate disposition. They met a cousin, Zelik, of Harold's father that decided to stay with them. Harold's father, being a strong and brave man, was offered a chance to escape with a "freedom fighters" group. He accepted, with the stipulation that his son and elderly cousin could join as well. They escaped the synagogue through a window and walked carefully to the new hiding place. Inside the empty house, they were led to a closet. After knocking, a few boxes were displaced and the group of four climbed down in to a deep hole in the cellar. The twenty by thirty-foot hole housed twelve men plus Harold's party of three. These men were severely unreceptive toward Harold because of his young age and also toward Zelik because of his old age and brittleness. During the day time, everyone had to remain extremely quite in order to not be heard by the Polish workers clearing the house above them. On the third night of their stay in the cellar, the group decided to leave and converge with other partisans. They would not allow Harold or Zelik to join them because the danger of traveling with them was too great. A jeweler, Mr. Wise, was too frightened to depart with the group. The men set out, leaving behind the faction of four. It was later learned that the group of freedom fighters had been killed in a fight with the SS. Mr. Wise had many gold coins and items of jewelry to trade with and requested Harold's father to find him a place to hide for the remainder of the war. After making a dangerous trek to a near by Polish village, Harold's father found a friend willing to hide Mr. Wise. Upon realizing that he had mistakenly brought Mr. Wises suitcase of gold back to the cellar hideout, Harold told his father, and they decided the correct thing to do would be to take it back to Mr. Wise. Again, the three made the risky journey to the Polish village. Mr. Wise let each of them keep some gold coins as a token of his gratitude for returning his suitcase. While they were returning Mr. Wise's belongings, the cellar hideout was discovered and raided. Fortunately, Harold and his father were not greedy and had decided to return the suitcase full of riches. The decision to leave this area and travel seventy-five miles to Bialystok was made and the following morning, the plans were carried out.

Traveling with the yellow Star of David in their pockets, the group took on the identity of Polish peasants and carried soap as a trading tool. At some points, the only food available was bacon. For Harold it was hard to eat, being raised as a non-pork eating Jew. To sleep in safety, they found barns or abandoned wagons which hid them from plain view. Upon arrival at the Bialystok ghetto, the SS briefly questioned the small party before throwing them into the ghetto. This ghetto was "untouched" or in other words, none of the Jewish people had been transported to concentration and death camps. Cousin Zelik found an old aunt and chose to stay with her. Harold and his father met a man who offered them a place to stay with himself and two other people. This man, Orbach, came up with the idea to make distilled alcohol and sell it for money. Harold offered the gold coin he had received from Mr. Wise's suitcase as a way to buy food for everyone, which freed them from working in order to make the alcohol.

By the summer of 1942, six months after Harold arrived in Bialystok, the living conditions on the ghetto had already deteriorated. Water was scarce and most of the sewer ran on top of the ground. Without hospitals or medicine, many people died from typhus and other insect-borne disease. Events similar to those Harold had witnessed in Grodno began to occur. Bialystok was near the railroad and when a train of boxcars was vacant a group of Jews were rounded up like cattle and sent on a five day trip to one of the extermination camps. After watching groups of their people being transported for about a month, Harold and his father's turn finally arrived. Early in the morning, they were awakened and made to march to the train station. They were continuously surrounded by the SS as they marched up the platform and into cattle cars with one door in the center. One hundred people were loaded into a car and then the door was shut. There were not any provisions in the cars: no water, no food, and no toilets. All the guards would tell them when asked where they were headed was, "Going to Germany to work." At one particular stop, Harold asked his father to hold him up to the window to get some fresh air. After a few minutes, a man pushed Harold out of the window saying that it was his turn. Suddenly, there was a shot. The man had been shot through the window by one of the guards. This was the first time Harold had witnessed death so closely. If the man had not forced Harold out of the way, it would have been him dead on the floor. When the train finally reached its destination, Harold was about to enter another concentration camp named Buchenwald.

Buchenwald was an extermination camp equipped with a gas chamber and a crematorium. The people in the transport were taken off the train and the able bodied were marched a few miles to the gates of the camp. The prisoners were told that all personal possessions were to be left behind. Harold's father had to leave behind the six twenty-dollar United States coins he received from Mr. Wise. While waiting to be taken for their bath and disinfection, a German guard asked if there were any tailors in the group. Harold and his father, along with approximately fifty other men, posed as tailors and were separated from the transport. They were taken to the bath house and ordered to undress and leave all clothing with the exception of belts behind. Harold enjoyed the long overdue shower with hot water and soap. After the shower, they were dusted with DDT powder and given "new" clothes and shoes. Harold was much too small for any of the clothes and had to make due

with a set of clothing for a large man. Less than thirty-six hours after they departed their train, Harold and his father were put on another with the "tailors." Blyzin was Harold's next stop. Here, he traded his newly issued pants for a loaf of bread and some smaller pants. In Blyzin, Harold and his father were on work detail until allowed to do less strenuous work. Harold ran a button-hole machine sewing button-holes on Nazi uniforms. He and his father also cut hair at night for extra provisions that helped keep them alive. During the cold winter, Harold adopted a philosophy to help himself cope and survive: "It's true that living conditions are at their worst and we have little to eat, but if we are resourceful and do what the Nazis want us to, we will survive until the war ends." Although Harold and his father were originally sent to Blyzin as tailors, they were reassigned to be barbers. As a result, their living conditions improved slightly. Harold remained in Blyzin for nine more months until his usefulness was depleted. He and his father were then sent to Auschwitz, a camp not too well known yet.

Once again, they were put in train cars with a hundred people, no food, and no toilet. The train moved painfully slow and seemed as if it would stop at any second, but never did. When the door finally opened, Harold smelt the burning of human bones. His father recognized a man who informed them that they would be killed that day in a gas chamber. The column of prisoners was marched towards the gas chambers. Suddenly, Harold was pulled out of the line, taking his father with him, by a high ranking officer because they appeared healthier than most. The small group chosen out of Harold's transport was taken, with another small group of new arrivals, to an area called Birkenau. Here they received a tattoo number on the left forearm and white striped uniforms that were to be worn at all times. Harold lived here for the next eleven months working sixteen hours days; ten in the crematorium and six policing and cleaning the barracks. Head count was taken many times a day to ensure no one had tried to escape. When the Russians began advancing, Auschwitz was shut down, and the remaining prisoners, Harold and his father included, were shipped out by train to a new place.

After three horribly hot and oxygen lacking days in the cattle car, the transport arrived in the Berlin railroad station. The detainees were abandoned in the car during a raid from the Allies. At any time, their car could have caught fire and everyone inside would have burned to death. The following morning, the transports journey to Oraninburg was completed. The weak and frail prisoners were put into a large hanger along with two thousand other people. Almost immediately, the prisoners were put to work cleaning the streets and picking up garbage. Once a day they received moldy bread and soup that more closely resembled dirty dish water. Twice a day an alarm would sound informing everyone that an Allied air raid could be approaching. Harold learned to tell where the planes were coming from and if the plane had already dropped its ammunition. One particular day, Harold noticed the engines sounded different, as if they had not released the bombs. Unexpectedly, the Allies began bombing a corner area of the camp that had a newly planted forest in it. This forest covered an airplane factory which was completely destroyed in the air raid. Given that there was no longer a use for the prisoners to work at this camp, they were yet again put on a train and shipped to Sachsenhausen. For the prisoner, "The fear of death was no longer threatening… Death was no longer a negative consequence."

The transport did not remain in Sachsenhausen very long and soon was moved to Dachau. Dachau was a non-working camp and most of Harold's time was spent scrubbing the barracks and policing the grounds. When there was nothing better to do, the SS would carry out head counts that could last for several hours. Food was minimal and the heat was produced by one small wood-burning stove in the center of the large barracks. Months later, a group, including Harold and his father, was sent to Lager #11 near Landsberg. The group was marched twenty miles to the facility. During the difficult march, many gave up or fell behind, leaving the group smaller when it arrived at its destination. Everyday, Harold marched eight miles to do his work carrying fifty-pound sacks of cement half a mile to the job site. When the eight hour work day was over, the prisoners still had to walk back eight miles to the barracks. Harold's father became a barber and in addition had to keep the barracks clean. Harold realized one day that he could obtain food from the garbage pit on the walk back from work. This small bit of garbage helped keep not only Harold and his father alive, but also other people that shared the food with them. Harold's father eventually got him a job as a barber as well. Many days, Harold's father helped him with his work load so that he could keep up. Soon, Harold and his father, being two of the more able-bodied prisoners, were chosen to dig mass graves and bury the frozen bodies of their peers.

In the spring of 1945, the Allies were crushing the Germans in the war. Camps such as Auschwitz, Maidanek, and Treblinka were already dismantled in an attempt by the Germans to hide the evidence they had mass murdered so many people. Dachau was also being disengaged and the remaining prisoners were led on a sixty-mile death march to Tyrol where they would eventually be shot. During the march, Allied planes zoomed over the heads of the prisoners in line who had all dropped to the ground. The SS commanded that the prisoners get up and continue on the march, hoping to get out of sight of the Allied pilots. When the planes came back again a few minutes later, the Nazi soldiers hid themselves in the ditches on either side of the road. A few prisoners, including Harold and his father, saw this as a chance to get away from the rule of the SS. They began running toward the forest while the soldiers yelled for them to return or be shot. The Allied planes again flew over, giving the handful of prisoners who chose not to return the chance to make it into the forest and hide. The escaped prisoners spent three days and three nights hiding in the forest. On the morning of May 5, 1945, Harold heard faint engine noises off in the distance. As the sounds got closer, and the tanks became visible, the group realized that these were not German, but American tanks. Immediately seeing how starved the prisoners were, the American soldiers gave them food and took them to a near by Displaced Person's Camp. As a result of the rich food they were not used to, many of the people who had escaped with Harold got sick and a few even died. Harold considered it a special gift to be alive and have the chance to keep living his life.

Subsequent to being freed, Harold and his father lived in München, making friends with many of the American soldiers. They worked for food and money and lived in an old abandoned winery bunkhouse among other homes they occupied during their stay

here. A cousin of Harold's father, Lona, stayed with them as well. The three applied for immigration papers to America and were accepted. Soon, they boarded a ship and began their journey to a new country full of wonderful opportunities. Harold was fascinated with everything that was new to him and inspected every nook and cranny of the ship. Before long, the three arrived at the New York port, meeting family of Harold's mother. After a few days of staying in New York and seeing the city, they made the journey to Los Angeles to stay with Harold's Uncle Julius. Traveling by train- a real train that was fast, smooth, clean, and had sparkling bathrooms- was an exciting adventure for Harold who had always been enthralled by locomotives. Once in L.A., Harold began school and graduated in one year after taking double classes and summer school for two summers. Harold's father married Lona, which put a strain on his relationship with Harold. Harold bought a gas station that enabled him to support himself nicely. He was introduced to a lovely young lady from Chicago named Joyce who would eventually become his wife.

Harold, who was not yet a United States citizen, sold his gas station so he could enlist in the Army to serve in the Korean War. Harold was "grateful for the opportunity to have had my education and my own business." He was sent to Fort Ord for basic training and then assigned to an ordinance company at Camp Irwin near Barstow, California. While he was stationed here, Harold received a letter from the Monterey County Courthouse instructing him to appear and be sworn in as a U.S. citizen. This event was a great joy for Harold as he was very appreciative to his new country for everything it offered him. Before being given his honorable discharge after a two year tour of duty, Harold was sent to Nevada and was a part of radiation tests for the early experimentations with atomic weaponry.

Harold went on to live with his wife, Joyce, in Salinas, where her family had moved. Here they raised two very accomplished sons. Harold purchased a service station which he owned for many years. As a result of having witnessed and been a part of the Holocaust, Harold wrote a book of his experiences to tell the story for all those who died at the hands of the Nazi. Although much anger and hurt was with Harold when he was finally freed from Nazi rule, he learned to overcome his past and, "Because of my decision at age fifteen to put hate on hold, choosing tolerance instead, it freed my heart from pain, enabling me to direct all my energies to a productive and satisfying life."

Harold's main objective is to inform the younger generation of the truth of what has happened in the past to ensure that history may never repeat itself in such a horrible way again. "We can't send all black people back to Africa. We can't send all Mexican people back to Mexico. We can't send all the Jewish people back to Egypt. It's like, trying to swim up the Colorado River, those are all negative and unachievable goals. So why waste the time on unachievable goals? But in the end, still we all must live together as Christian, Catholics, Protestants and Jewish faith and, husband and wife must, and different nationalities must live together. If we don't, then it will be the ultimate destruction of a very fragile civilization. This is where we're heading now, but people don't realize… we are all born the same, we all lease space on earth [for a] specified time, not all the same specified time, but eventually we all come to an end. As far as religion, which is the true

religion, no one can ever say or claim to be... because religion is a belief and not a fact. In other words, no one can come back to tell you what is really, which one is really true. Therefore, personally I respect all races, I respect all religions, I am having a little trouble with the one religion that wants to kill everybody else, but I respect them..."

Assembly Member Juan Vargas
AD79

Is honored to present
the story of Holocaust Survivors

Kurt and Ruth Sax

Acknowledgement

Rabbi Jeff Lipshultz
Temple Beth Sholom in Chula Vista

Kurt and Ruth Sax

by Andrew Kornblatt

Kurt Sax was born in the little town of Stockerau, Austria. His father died from heart failure as a result of infections spread during World War I. He moved in with his Grandmother and loved his early life. Certain things he didn't like about the country; Austria was very anti-Semitic. "Especially the younger generation," Mr. Sax explained, "they would call me all sort of names and it was not pleasant, and I still remember that when I went to High School, my uncles owned a business there and at lunch each day one of them had to pick me up when there was snow, or those other kids would have made a snow man out of me."

Ruth was born in Sumperg, Czechoslovakia in the Maravia region, but was raised in Brno. She was the only Jewish girl in the public school and when she finished the 4th grade she was told she could not return because she was Jewish. As a result of this she attended a private Jewish school until it too was closed two years later. They kept their studies up for a while by congregating children in an apartment to be tutored by a Jewish teacher. Neighbors began to get suspicious because they would see large groups of children going to the same apartment week after week, so the teaching sessions were broken up.

Her grandfather used to go every summer to Austria to visit with Kurt's family. One year he helped Kurt study for his Bar Mitzvah ceremony and told him to come visit him after the ceremony. He took the man up on his offer and visited Ruth's family. "I met this little girl, she was seven and I was 13, and we played hide and seek and ran around, she claims that I either 'boxed her or kissed her.'"

Then Hitler came.

Kurt was very interested in politics at that time, more so than others his age. As he explains it, the constant insults regarding his religion and background inspired him to learn more about the people who were doing it to try and understand why and how to "get out of there". When Hitler rose to power, Mr. Sax knew fear about the future, "If [the non-Jewish Austrians] treated me this bad before Hitler, how would they treat me after? I told my relatives I was leaving the country."

In 1938, around July, Ruth's family went to Vienna to visit everyone. Kurt talked with Ruth's father about his plans for the future. "I said 'I'm working on immigration and you should do the same because you are going to be next.'" The following March Czechoslovakia was run over by the Nazi's. Two years later, Ruth and her parents were forced into concentration camps.

One night Ruth's mother woke her up in the middle of the night to flee. She remembers that there were swastikas everywhere when the day before there were none. The family drove to the factory that Ruth's father represented and found out that it had been seized from the owners who were Jewish and was given to the non-Jewish director of the factory. "He was always pleasant but all of the sudden he had a swastika and saying, 'I am now in charge of the factory, you might as well turn around and go home because Hitler will occupy all of Czechoslovakia." When the family returned home they found that their apartment was being searched by two SS men, they destroyed their property and confiscated the keys to her father's car; cutting off his livelihood.

When Kurt became desperate to get out of the country, he took the train to Vienna and went to the chamber of commerce to look up telephone books. He looked up as many variations of "Sax" as he could; Sax, Saks, Sacks, Sachs… etc. He wrote 120 letters asking for help in coming to America. He refused to use carbon copies to send these letters, he considered it rude. He received a letter from a family in Baltimore. In March of that year, he received his papers, paid for by this family who also sponsored three other children. In 1939 Mr. Sax was in Italy waiting for his ship to be able to leave, the week the war broke out, and the boatmen were telling people from Austria to go back, Mr. Sax stayed in Italy, living on nothing for two weeks until he was told that the port authorities were going to allow some boats to America. Even though Italy and Germany were allies, the boating company refused to accept the tickets bought with German Marks. Mr. Sax had to contact the family in Baltimore to send three tickets; one for him, one for his uncle who raised him and his wife. Within a few days the tickets were received. Years later, Kurt's Uncle was able to pay back the man for the tickets for him and his wife, but the sponsor refused to accept payment for Kurt's because the man was proud of the way Kurt grew up.

On December 5th, 1941 Ruth and her famly were shipped to Theresienstadt. They were there for about three years when they were shipped to Auschwitz. Luckily, Ruth and her family were only there for a few days until they were sent to Örduran in a working group. She went back to Theresienstadt when the Russians began to advance and was finally liberated. She went back to her hometown and found her father who was hiding in a cellar of an aunt who was living with false papers. He had run away from the camp he was sent to five days before the war ended. When they reunited in their hometown they were given an apartment with nothing; they had nothing but they considered it a miracle that their family had survived, mother, father, and daughter. Others were not so lucky, of the 11,000 Jewish people from her home town, only 200 came back and Ruth's was the only one who had her immediate family alive. Ruth's family started taking in orphans to live in their apartment. At one point they had 24 children in one room with a shared bathroom and kitchen. They helped these children get to America and Israel and Australia. Ruth's father was given a job as a buyer for a business, but since it was under communist control there was barely enough to survive as it was.

Kurt lived in Baltimore for 9 months and then in South Carolina for 3 years until finally coming to California, "I thought [South Carolina] was paradise until I moved out

here and thought this might be better." After the war, while Kurt Sax was living in America and visiting New York, Mr. Sax found out that Ruth was still alive. His aunt had given him a picture of Ruth after she and Kurt's mother had visited Ruth's family. "When I saw that picture, I already knew who my bride would be." The main obstacle that was now in their way was that the Communists had just taken over Czechoslovakia. They started corresponding but she couldn't get a visa to come to America. They continued this for a year and the conditions for Ruth began to get worse. Kurt sold his possessions; a saxophone, an accordion and his car. He bought a one way ticket to Europe. "I figured, G-d will help me to get back again. I came to America the first time and I can come a second time." He stayed with Ruth's family and two or three weeks later they were married. They have been married for 57 years.

When Mrs. Sax got her visa to go to the United States they went to Italy but the boat workers went on strike. The Sax's survived by selling newspapers and changing money but eventually made it to New York

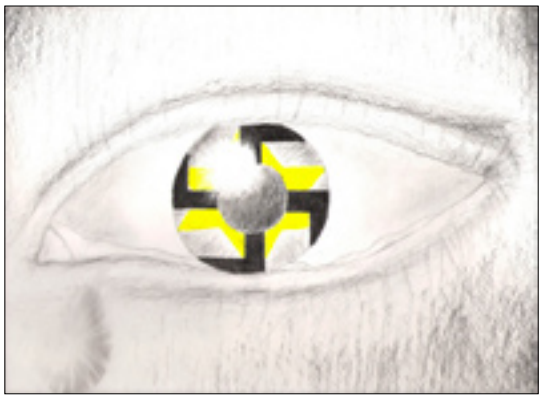
In 1949 they settled in San Diego and when their first child was one they moved to Chula Vista. They purchased their first home in Chula Vista which was on 5th Avenue. Their neighbors knew them as "Sax 5th Ave."

They have two children and four grandchildren.

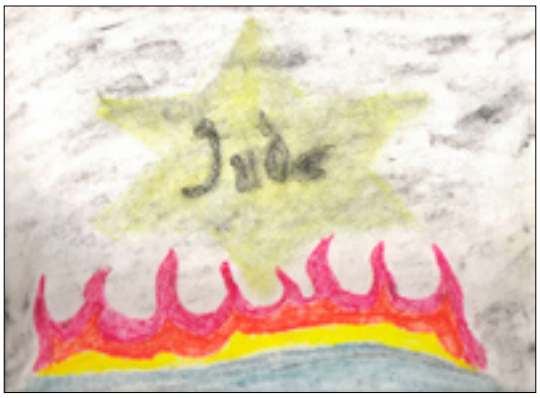
Mr. Sax has been a very active member of the Jewish Community having been the president of a local Synagogue for 2 years and the fundraiser for more years than he can remember.

Mrs. Sax has been trying for years to deal with the Swiss Banks and government to reclaim an account that had been stolen from her and her family by the Nazi regime, but with much resistance.

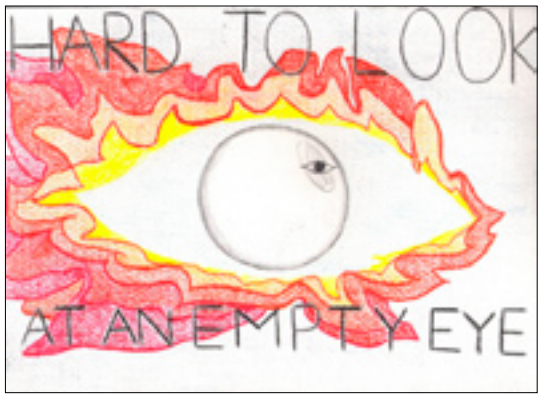
They still live in Chula Vista and "love it here."



David Osofsky - No title



Anonymous - Out of the Ashes



Jessa Deutsch - Hard to Look at an Empty Eye

Daniel Gavens - Locked Up

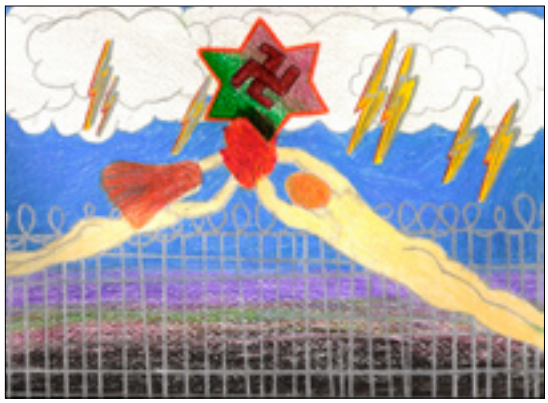
Max Blumenthal - Harvest Time

Sarah Gafter - Untitled

"The legacy of the survivors of the Holocaust must live on through the voices of others in order that this chapter in our history is never forgotten and never allowed to take place again."

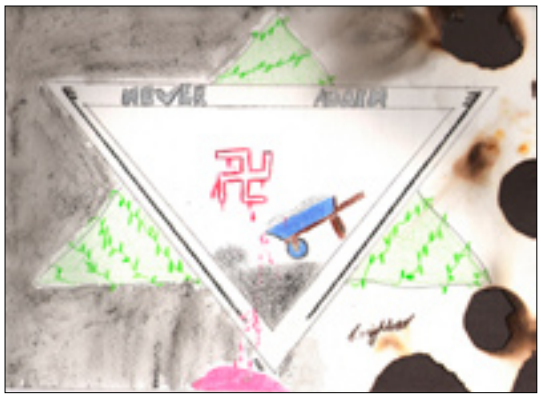
Rebecca Cohn
Assemblymember, 24th District

Talia Salzman - Tree of (Life) Death



Andrea Herman - The Only Escape

Arielle Tieger - We Have Survived



Jason Mighdoll - Never Again

Natalie Roth - Hannah Senesh

Eliana Green - Sacred Light

Amit Deutsch - The Path of Ignorance

Ari Fine - Death Walk